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OR,

THE AVENGING SON.

A ROMANCE OF THE GULF.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE OUTLAWED MIDDY," "THE
HUNTED MIDSHIPMAN," "MERLE, THE
MIDDY," "LIEUTENANT LEO,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO SCHOONERS.

Two vessels were sailing swiftly over the
waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The one was pursued, the other pursuing, and
hot and fast, from the stern guns of one and the

INSTANTLY HE MADE UP HIS MIND, AND SEIZING JUAQUITA IN HIS STRONG ARM
LAFITTE RAN TO THE BULWARKS AND SPRUNG WITH HER INTO THE SEA.

bow guns of the other, thundered forth a heavy fire, each suffering under the cruel blows.

The vessels were about the same size, schooner rigged, armed heavily for craft of their tonnage, and their decks were crowded with men.

They were beautiful models of marine architecture, and carried a vast spread of canvas.

Along the shores of the Gulf they sped, and the pursuer was slowly gaining upon the pursued.

The decks of each had been stained with life-blood, and the sails were torn here and there, and ratlines and stays severed by the hot fire kept up on board of each.

Upon the deck of the leader stood a man with a cruel, angry-looking face—a man whose nature was stamped upon every feature of his countenance.

He was dressed in a uniform that was gaudy in the extreme, and wore a brace of pistols and sword for arms.

"Choteau, the chief is gaining on us, so we will soon have to fight it out," he said, in a hoarse voice, as he lowered his glass from his eye, after a long look at the schooner in his wake.

"Yes, Captain Ricardo, the Destiny is gaining, and it will be a desperate struggle, when it comes to a hand-to-hand fight—that is, if our men will fight, when they know that Commodore Lafitte commands the schooner, and not, as you led them to believe, captors of the craft," answered Choteau, a young sailor who was evidently an officer.

"Well, they must fight, for I will tell them soon that Lafitte sold himself to the Americans, and got his pardon on condition that he would hunt down Ricardo and his crew and hang them."

"That will make them fight, surely, Captain Ricardo."

"But can you understand any reason why Lafitte should be pursuing us as he is?"

"Well, yes, Choteau."

"I wish you could give us a reason, captain."

"Lafitte received, from that British brig-of-war that was off our island, and which Lieutenant Leo boarded, an offer to join the English in their attack on New Orleans."

"One of the guards heard what was said by Lafitte and Lord Lennox, whom you remember Leo took to the chief's headquarters?"

"Yes, I remember, sir."

"Lord Lennox, the English officer, made Lafitte an offer of a captain's berth in the king's navy, so much money, and pardon for himself and men, if they would join the British."

"Lafitte made a larger claim, to gain time, it seems, and sent his son, Lieutenant Leo, to New Orleans, with an offer to serve the Americans."

"His offer was accepted, and he sailed, as you know, in his schooner with a picked crew, and left me in command of the stronghold."

"I got on a spree, as you know, the men followed my example, and the American fleet came and surprised us, we alone escaping in this schooner."

"Now the battle of New Orleans was fought and won, as you know the skipper of the merchant brig we captured, told us, and Lafitte and his crew was there."

"Now we find him at sea in his vessel, and he is evidently gaining his pardon by hunting me down, and it is a spice of revenge, as my drunken orgie lost the stronghold and fleet to him."

"I think you are right, sir," replied Choteau.

"I am sure that I am, and if the crew do not beat off Lafitte's vessel, we will all be taken and hanged by our old chief."

"And if we beat him off the sea is before us to fly our black flag and enrich ourselves."

"Yes, Choteau."

"It would be a good idea to tell the men, sir, and let them know just what they are to expect."

"I will, and let them understand that our old chief has proven a traitor to us, and that now it will be no longer Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, but Ricardo, the Rover of the Seas," and pleased with this view of himself, Captain Ricardo called his men aft, excepting the few whose duties kept them at their posts, and told them just what had been made known regarding their old chief Lafitte the pirate commodore, and gave them to understand that, to gain pardon for himself and his men, he meant to sacrifice them.

"Now, lads, it is death at the yard arm unless you beat off, or capture Lafitte, so do your duty."

A cheer answered his words, and Ricardo felt pleased to know that his men would dare fight to the bitter end, Lafitte their old chief.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN'S THREAT.

HARDLY had Ricardo, who claimed that his chief, and not himself, was the traitor, gotten the sanction of his crew to fight Lafitte to the death, when suddenly, out from behind a high headland, shot a large brig-of-war.

She carried the British colors, was, in appearance, a match for both of the schooners, and seemed to decide that one of them at least should be her prey.

The appearance of the stranger caused considerable excitement upon the deck of Ricardo's vessel, the Firebug.

Should the latter be made the object of the brig's attention, her career must end very quickly.

Should the Englishman, on the other hand, turn his attention to the schooner Destiny, then the Firebug stood every chance to escape from both the brig and the schooner, and this was what the pirate captain and his crew longed for, as, outside of the British vessel-of-war altogether, they had no desire to fight Lafitte.

They knew that he had proven himself invincible in many a desperate engagement, and had begun as the master spirit of the buccaneers of Barrataria, who had been strong enough for the British to offer most generous terms for an alliance with them against the Americans.

After a few moments of suspense, in which they received a broadside from the British brig, a cheer rung out from the Firebug's crew, as they beheld the Englishman square away toward the Destiny.

"We have been saved, Choteau, for had the brig attacked us the end would quickly have come, and I had I must now confess, little hope of a victory over Lafitte," said Ricardo.

"Nor had I hope, sir, to defeat the chief; but see, he intends to boldly fight the brig and not run from it."

"So it seems; but if he does, he seals his doom."

"It would be a gallant thing, Captain Ricardo, to put back and aid Lafitte in his fight."

"I am not taking such chances, Choteau."

"I believe the two schooners could capture the brig, sir."

"And then?"

"We would have saved the chief and his vessel."

"And he would, had he the power, hang us for our pains."

"I do not believe Lafitte would do that, sir."

"Well, to whom would the prize belong, did we capture her?"

"I had not thought of that, sir."

"Then Lafitte having turned honest, and we being still pirates, how would we get along, for oil and water won't mix, Senior Choteau."

"True, Captain Ricardo."

"No, we have been lucky enough to escape, so we will sail on our way and leave Lafitte to his fate, and that we can guess, for see, he is boldly fighting a foe double his size," and Ricardo turned his glass upon the plucky schooner, while his own vessel sailed away in the gathering gloom of night, leaving the Destiny contending against her powerful foe.

Further and further away sailed the Firebug, until at last the flashes of the guns ceased, and the battle at sea was ended.

"We are in luck," commented Ricardo.

"Lafitte's doom has come, his fleet was wiped out, his last fight is ended, and now it is Ricardo, the Rover of the Gulf, Senior Choteau."

"Yes, senior," replied the pirate lieutenant, and his voice was sad, for the magnificent battle made by his former chief, against a foe that gave him no hope of victory, caused him to sorrow for the fate of the man who had so long led the Buccaneers of Barrataria to fortune upon the high seas even though it had been under the black flag.

The British brig-of-war had been lying at anchor, close in under the headland, when the firing of the two schooners was heard.

A lookout was sent to a cliff and reported two armed schooners coming down the coast, firing hotly at each other.

The men were ashore getting water from a spring, and were soon recalled, the Vulture, for such was her name, stripped for action, and soon she ran out from under the headland, coming in between the pursued and pursuing craft.

A glance was sufficient to show that the leading schooner was doing her best to escape, and that her fire was very deliberate and severe upon her pursuer.

It was also seen by one and all upon the

Vulture that she carried at her peak a large flag, the field jet-black and in the center a pair of golden wings.

This stamped her as one of Lafitte's fleet, known as the Buccaneer Fleet of Barrataria.

But the schooner in chase carried no colors, and was replying to the fire of the fugitive with equal effect.

That the brig, from her position, had her picks of either schooner, was evident.

Naturally it would have been supposed that the commander of the Vulture would have taken the one flying the black flag, under the supposition that the vessel in her wake, showing no colors, was a cruiser.

But the captain of the Vulture prepared to let the leading schooner go with a broadside, and turned his attention to the one in chase.

The reason of this was made known by Captain Grayson, of the brig, in his own words.

"Yonder craft flies no colors, Harbinger, but she is the schooner of Lafitte, the flagship of his pirate squadron," he said to his first officer.

"Yes, sir, she does certainly appear so."

"I know it, for I can never be fooled in a vessel I have several times chased, and such a craft as that one is, for there is not another like her in these waters."

"Can Lafitte be on board, sir?" asked Lieutenant Harbinger.

"He must be, though why he carries no flag I cannot tell—oh! a thought occurs to me."

"Well, sir?"

"He refused the offers Lord Lennox made to him to join us and, as you know, joined the Americans, and, as Packenham's men told us, fought them desperately."

"He has doubtless been promised a pardon by General Jackson, if he will hunt from the seas his former companions in crime."

"It does seem so, sir, and he can carry no flag until he is pardoned by the Americans?"

"Yes; but an American pardon is not an English one, as he shall know."

"Had he accepted General Packenham's most generous offers and aided us, we would have taken New Orleans beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"As he refused, and fought against us, he is still Lafitte the Pirate, and I feel revengeful toward him, for I still smart under our defeat at New Orleans, Harbinger."

"We cannot help feeling it, sir."

"No, and I shall let the man go for the master, and, capturing Lafitte, as we may say we have him in our power, I shall hang him to the yard-arm of the Vulture, and thus punish him for his crimes and rub out the snub he gave us in refusing the magnanimous offers made him."

"Give the fugitive schooner a broadside, or two, Harbinger, and then we will devote our attention to Lafitte, and woe be unto him, for I am revengeful, I assure you."

The order of Captain Grayson was obeyed, and the Vulture, British brig-of-war, made the schooner Destiny the object of her attack.

CHAPTER IV.

LAFITTE'S LEGACY.

LET us now take a look on board the schooner Destiny, which was in pursuit of the Firebug, when she became the object of attack by the Vulture.

Her decks showed the perfection of neatness, even though the craft had been under fire.

Her crew were at their posts, and no men-of-war's men were under better discipline.

They were mostly clad in a regular uniform, and stood at their posts ready to die, if their commander so ordered.

Amidships, seated upon a starboard gun and watching the shore, seemingly wholly indifferent to the fire of the schooner they were chasing, sat a negro.

He was of African birth, uncouth in appearance, with his long arms and body, and short legs.

He was dressed very gorgeously, and appeared very fond of his costume which was of velvet and silk.

He wore a sash to which hung a cimeter, and in which was stuck a pair of pistols and a long, ugly-looking knife.

Upon his head was a scarlet silk turban, in strange contrast to his black skin.

Upon his breast was a pair of yellow bird's wings, spread, and rings, bracelets and other ornaments of a unique kind made up his striking and strange attire.

At his feet almost a sailor was cut down by a shot from the Firebug, but he did not change a muscle, and merely glanced at the mutilated

body as it was quickly removed by four seamen.

Upon the quarter-deck, besides the helmsman, were three persons, evidently the commander and his officers.

One of these was a young Spaniard, with a reckless, dissipated face, and dressed like a sailor dandy.

He was coolly watching the chase, for the brig had not then shot out into view from beyond the headland, for the vessels were running along the coast at an average distance of a mile from it.

The other two are those whom no one would pass and not take a second glance.

One was a man who had passed the mile-stone of two-score years.

Tall, straight as an arrow, with broad shoulders and a perfection of form that was rare, he was an ideal of manhood.

He wore a uniform that was handsome in the extreme, and yet could not be found laid down in the "Regulations" of any navy in the world.

His sword, one of long blade, was a superb one, the hilt being studded with rare gems.

His face denoted indomitable pluck, stern resolve, and was that of a man who had, from some cause, suffered deeply, and had become the football of fate.

His eyes were dark, piercing, and at times sad, as he glanced toward the third person of the group of officers, and who was strangely like the elder, who was Lafitte, a man who has gone down to history as the Pirate of the Gulf, a man who had good and bad strangely mixed in his nature.

The one upon whom he looked with saddened gaze, was his son, a youth of nineteen, in both face and form strangely like his father.

His form had not yet become as elegant, as was Lafitte's, nor was his face haunted with the look of commingled sternness and sadness; but the form withal was very graceful, the face strikingly handsome.

Like Lafitte, he was superbly uniformed, and his pistols and sword were gold-mounted and gemmed.

When the brig shot into view the face of Lafitte did not change.

He saw that it was a question as to whether the Vulture would select his vessel or Ricardo's for her victim.

To escape he knew was impossible for both of the schooners.

It was soon decided which one Captain Grayson meant to make the Vulture's prey, and then Lafitte gave a few orders to Senor Rafael, his lieutenant, and calling to his son, Lieutenant Leo, entered his cabin.

The face of the chief was pale and haggard, as though from recent illness, and before reaching his cabin he dropped into a chair in a tired kind of way.

"Leo, my son, I have a few words to say to you, and what I would make known must be told quickly, for the end is near," he said.

"You think there is no chance with us, then, against the brig, father?" coolly returned Leo.

"Not the slightest, but we can die game."

"If I fall, you are at liberty to surrender the schooner, if you wish."

"But, as long as I live, I shall not do so, not even were the brig-of-war a frigate."

"I recognize the brig as the Vulture, who brought Lord Lennox to me with the offers of pardon and rank to serve the English."

"I chose, as an American, to serve my country."

"We did our best, and in return no pardon was given us; they sought to put us in irons, and but for you, it would have been done."

"Warned by the nun, Sister Mercedes, who nursed me in the convent when I was wounded, we escaped with our vessel, and, as I had pledged my word not to again hoist the black flag, I kept it when we sighted Ricardo."

"He proved himself a traitor to us, Leo, and I meant to capture him and send him in as the last of my pirate fleet, while we could await at sea to discover if we were to receive a pardon for our services, and if not, to join the Colombian Navy, who would have been glad of our aid."

"But it is not to be, it seems, and to me, the end is near—I feel it!"

"The Americans, while we were serving them, attacked and destroyed my stronghold, and this vessel is all that is left to Lafitte."

"If you live, Leo, through this battle, seek Governor Claiborne, at New Orleans, tell him that we were trying to do our duty in running down Ricardo, when attacked by the Vulture."

"Then, get a vessel and still hunt that man from the seas."

"Here, in this package, you will find my legacy."

"It tells you who you are, who your mother was and all about you."

"It tells you of my early life, and why it was that I became Lafitte the Pirate."

"Upon reading it, do as you deem best as regards your own career."

"If you die with me, so perishes Lafitte, his son, and his secret."

"You will find in this leather pouch a number of rare gems."

"I selected them myself, and you will find that each gem is worth a thousand dollars, many considerably more, and there are over a hundred of them, so you will not be a pauper."

"You will also find in this bag a small package of gems, addressed to 'Sister Mercedes, the nun.'"

"Give them to her, to be presented to the church as an offering for prayers for the repose of Lafitte's soul, a slight recompense for the crimes he has committed, the evil he has done others."

"If you perish, of course all perishes with you, my legacy and my resolves."

"Now, Leo, bid me farewell, and now let us go on deck, for the Vulture has opened fire."

The youth could utter no word; but placing the package in an inner pocket, he grasped his father's hand in silence, and then, without another word uttered by either, went on deck.

Leo, at an order from his father, and chief, took the helm, and the battle to the death was begun.

No quarter was asked, none would be shown, and thus the fight waged, until at last, in the darkness of night, with her guns still firing as the sea washed into their muzzles, her crew fighting them to the bitter end, Senor Rafael dying on deck amid a heap of dead and wounded, and Lafitte calm, defiant and unconquered, Leo coolly accepting his fate, the beautiful schooner went down to her grave in the depths of the Gulf.

The Vulture had won the victory, but dearly earned indeed it was, and the moans of anguish drowned the faint cheers of the victors.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

A FEW scenes in the life of Lafitte, and which he had written out to make known to his son, Leo, in case he should survive the battle with the British brig-of-war, may not be out of place here, that the reader may the better understand the young hero of this story when he comes to see him again, for the pirate lieutenant met not his death in the schooner on that fateful night.

A score of years before the chase of Ricardo, and the unequal battle between the brig Vulture and little schooner Destiny, a vessel was cruising along the shores of Jamaica one afternoon, when suddenly out of a little harbor shot a small sail-boat, containing three persons.

The vessel was an armed craft, and while cruising close inshore had evidently tried to put on the garb of honesty, for the American flag floated at the peak, and the crew had been rigged out in a makeshift for a uniform, while the officers actually wore the costume of the United States Navy.

But, to a close eye the cheat would have been observable, for a more villainous-looking set, from commander to cabin-boy, could not have been found on any craft afloat.

There was not an American in the lot, unless he came from elsewhere in America than the United States.

Spaniards, Portuguese, French, negroes and a few English were the nationalities represented, and the faces of one and all were stamped with crime that was never to be effaced from their countenances.

The officers, four in number, were Spaniards beyond all doubt, cunning, cruel-faced and reckless.

Their commander, a young man of nearly twenty-five, had some pretensions to good looks and an attractive form, if you did not analyze his face.

He evidently believed himself very handsome, and took great care of his personal appearance; but a mask even would not have hidden the devil in his nature.

That the schooner, which was well armed, was cruising so close along the shores for no good purpose, and masquerading as an American cruiser, was evident, or would have been to the glance of a skilled seaman.

When she was about to cross the entrance to a small bay, the little sail-boat came in sight.

It was a tiny craft, but very stanch, and was skimming along briskly upon the waters.

As has been stated, it held three occupants. One of these was a negro man, who sat at the tiller and acted as skipper.

Another was a bright-faced quadroon, who was engaged in knitting some fancy article of apparel, while the third, and by no means least, was a maiden of scarcely more than seventeen, very lovely with her dark, Spanish beauty, very fascinating in the gleams of her radiant black eyes.

That she was the daughter of some one upon whom fortune had smiled most kindly could be seen, for she was richly attired, even for an afternoon's sail, and the comb in her dark hair, the lace about her neck, and her fingers all sparkled with jewels.

She was half-reclining upon an easy seat in the boat, an open book in her lap, but her eyes fastened not upon the open page, as she seemed to be enjoying the beautiful scenery along the shores of the little bay.

A half-league astern the shores sloped down to a sandy beach, and above this was a grand villa home, surrounded with vast flower-gardens, lawns, and a park of magnificent trees in the background.

It was here that the maiden lived, and she was the daughter of a Spanish officer who had been exiled by his king, having been suspected of a conspiracy against the crown.

He had brought vast riches with him in his exile, and had married a lady who could match his wealth dollar for dollar.

His wife had died a few years after her marriage, and Don Marco Mateo had been left alone with only his young daughter, Juquita, to cheer him in his exile.

He lived a life of luxurious indolence, giving his daughter the best education that could be obtained from skilled preceptors, and thus the years rolled by until Juquita reached her seventeenth year, when she became a great belle and was sought after by wealthy planters, and the army and navy officers who were stationed at Jamaica, or who visited the ports of the island.

But Juquita's heart remained untainted, and so it was, when that pleasant afternoon she went to sail upon the blue waters of the bay.

She was fond of the sea, and her father had perfect confidence in the seamanship of his negro boatman, to whose care Juquita was intrusted, when, with her faithful quadroon maid, Chita, she was wont to enjoy a sail on a pleasant afternoon.

Of late Jaco, the negro boatman, had not appeared himself, having become morose and sullen, Juquita thought; but then her father had had him punished severely for some act he had been guilty of, and, as he was polite to her, and obedient, the maiden had not reported his changed manner to the Don.

"You are standing out too far, Jaco, for my father has forbidden you to run beyond the point yonder, and see, we are in the pass that takes us out into the sea," said Juquita, as the negro sailor was holding on out through the entrance to the little bay, around the shores of which the estate of Don Marco Mateo was situated.

"All right, senorita, Jaco put back soon," was the reply, and as the negro spoke a strange light suddenly came into his eyes, as the schooner shot into view.

Juquita saw the vessel also, as did Chita the maid, and the latter uttered a cry of alarm.

"Put back at once, Jaco! I command you," cried Juquita.

"Schooner no bad ship—see flag, good American," answered the negro, and he still held on.

The pass, or entrance to the little bay, was not more than a hundred yards in width, so that, when the schooner came into view from the left arm, or headland, she was within less than half a mile of the little sail-boat.

"Put back, Jaco!" cried the maiden, anxiously.

"No, senorita, Jaco go on to the schooner," was the exultant reply of the negro skipper, and, to her horror, Juquita saw him signal the craft, which was now standing directly down upon the little yacht.

CHAPTER VI.

REVENGE AND RETRIBUTION.

THE words of the negro startled Juquita greatly, for his face showed a look of revenge and hatred combined that caused her to feel that he meant to do as he said, and she believed that he knew just what the vessel was.

Chita was also alarmed, and glanced anxiously from the negro boatman to her mistress.

Juaquita, however, possessed both courage and presence of mind, so she said, calmly:

"Do you know what the vessel is, Jaco?"

"Yes, senorita."

"What is it?"

"Jaco know."

"Well?"

"Him pirate."

Juaquita turned pale, and Chita uttered a cry of terror.

"Do you mean it, Jaco?" and Juaquita still remained perfectly calm.

"Yes, soon see, senorita."

"She looks like a vessel-of-war."

"Yes, fighting vessel; but fight for gold."

"Him pirate."

"And yet she flies the flag of the Americans?" said the maiden, who well knew the flags of different nations.

"Pretty face don't make good heart; flag don't make honest craft," returned the negro.

"How do you know she is a pirate?"

"Senor whip Jaco very hard."

"Jaco have feeling; go to see pirate captain; tell him want revenge."

"He come here with vessel; Jaco give senorita up to pirate; get gold and revenge, too."

"Jaco have feeling; have revenge in heart, too."

The face of the negro showed that he meant all that his cruel words implied.

Juaquita did not move, and yet her brain was busy, while her heart seemed to stand still.

Chita was in an agony of dread.

The negro watched them both, and held on his way toward the schooner.

Suddenly Juaquita resolved to act.

She had in her sash a pretty toy, in the shape of a gun-bitted dirk, which had taken her fancy one day, and she used it for a paper-cutter, never expecting to have to make a deadly weapon of it.

Chita had in her lap a pair of scissors, and upon these the eyes of the beautiful Spanish maiden fell with a look which the quadroon seemed to heed, for she grasped them eagerly.

Instantly Juaquita sprung from her seat, her hand uplifted, and in it the sharp dirk, while confronting the negro the beautiful girl cried:

"Put back, Jaco, or I will drive this dirk to your black heart!"

The negro had a coward's heart, and as he was unarmed, the bold act of the maiden fairly unmanned him.

Chita had also risen and now, understanding the look of her mistress, seized her scissors and stepped forward as though to spring upon Jaco, if he attempted to still stand on toward the vessel.

Jaco was now cowed, and instantly obeyed the command of his young mistress and put the craft about.

As he did so, his hand fairly trembling, as it rested upon the tiller, Juaquita glanced toward the schooner and saw that there was some excitement on board.

She instantly changed her course, in chase of the little yacht, and a moment after from her bows came a puff of smoke.

There was a deep roar, a rushing sound, as of many wings in air, and then a terrific shock as the solid shot severed the head of the treacherous negro from his body, and cut the little mast in twain.

It was no wonder that a wild cry broke from the lips of the maiden, for the revengeful negro had quickly met with restitution; but the little craft was a wreck and Juaquita Mateo knew that she was now in the power of the vessel which Jaco had said was a pirate.

She tried to retain her consciousness; but, all before her grew dark, and she sunk in the bottom of the boat, while Chita in great alarm bent over her.

Half an hour afterward, when Juaquita regained her consciousness, she found herself in a vessel's cabin, and Chita was by her side.

The eyes of the negress were red from weeping, and she cried eagerly, as she saw that her mistress had recovered from her swoon:

"Oh, senorita! Jaco was right, for this is a pirate vessel."

Juaquita shuddered, but with a mighty effort arose and looked about her.

The appearance of the cabin was not uninviting, and yet there was that about it that proved she was indeed upon no honest craft.

As she looked about her a shadow darkened the companionway, and her captor entered.

It was the young commander of the vessel, and he had tried to look his best, hoping to make an impression upon his beautiful captive.

But Juaquita simply read his cruel face, and her heart sunk within her as she felt that she must look to such a man for mercy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIRATE.

"SEÑORITA MATEO, I am your very humble servant," said Captain Ravello, the pirate captain, as he bent in a low bow before the maiden.

"May I ask, senor, how it is I find myself upon your vessel?" said Juaquita, firmly.

"You were out sailing, senorita, and your little yacht started to run from me; I fired upon her, your helmsman was slain, the mast was cut down, and you fainted."

"While in that condition I brought you here."

"And why have you brought me here?"

"I had arranged, senorita, with one of your father's slaves, to get you into my power; but he has met his punishment for his treachery to you."

"And why am I held by you, Senor Captain?"

"I need money, senorita, and your father is rich."

"Your ransom will help me out, for my men are in ugly humor of late, having had more iron and steel than gold," was the unflinching response.

"You are a pirate, then?"

"I am."

"Yet you have an honest flag at your peak."

"It was to attract no attention while sailing close inshore."

"And the ransom you demand?"

"Twenty thousand pesos for you, senorita, and your maid's value as a slave in gold."

"It is infamous, and my father will not pay it," indignantly said Juaquita.

"He must, if he expects to again see his daughter."

"Should he be unable to do so?"

"He is wealthy, and can pay far more; but I will be generous."

"Will you send my maid ashore with a statement of your terms, senor?"

"No, I will cruise out to sea for a day or so, to let your father fully appreciate your love, and then return myself and make terms with him."

"Should he refuse, senor?"

"You will then have to become a pirate's bride, Senorita Mateo, for I already love you, and would really prefer your affection to the sum named in gold."

"Infamous, insulter, leave me!"

"Your price will be paid, and your punishment will soon follow."

The pirate laughed lightly and replied:

"I will leave you, senorita; but you must not look upon me with hatred."

"This cabin is at your disposal, and no one shall intrude, so make yourself contented."

"In that chest is feminine apparel, and you can make use of all you may need, while my slave shall look to your comfort!"

"Adios, Senorita Mateo, and remember that Captain Ravello, though a pirate, is at least a gentleman."

With this the man left the cabin, and poor Juaquita was alone with her quadroon maid.

"Oh, Chita! did you hear his fearful words?" she cried.

"Yes, senorita, and yet your father will gladly pay the sum he demands, so do not worry."

"Oh, yes, he will pay the gold, if this wicked man will only take me back to him."

"But to think of Jaco's treachery!"

"Yes, senorita, and of his quick punishment."

"It was awful, Chita!"

"And deserved, senorita."

"Ah, yes! but let us at least make ourselves comfortable here—is land in sight?"

Chita glanced out of the stern ports and replied:

"Yes, senorita, but far off."

A sigh escaped the lips of the brave girl, and then she threw herself into an easy-chair and began to think, for hers was a brave nature, and she did not despair, desperate as was her situation.

Two days thus passed away, and each morning and evening the pirate captain made a short visit to his captive.

He seemed anxious to get into her good graces, and dressed himself with the greatest care.

In fact, Captain Ravello had begun to feel that he would prefer to make Juaquita a pirate's bride than to get the ransom he demanded for her.

It was true that his men were in ugly humor about their lack of success of late.

But Ravello had plenty of gold and precious stones stored away in his own private lockers, and, though he had always pleaded poverty with his men, he yet felt that he could put them in good humor did they show a disposition to mutiny, in case he did not get ransom for his captive.

Toward the afternoon of the third day of Juaquita's captivity, a vessel was sighted.

It was a small schooner, not so large, well manned or heavily armed as was the craft of Ravello, and so the latter had little fear of her.

As the two drew nearer the stranger ran up to the peak a black flag, in the center of which was a pair of golden wings.

"Hal! it is the flag of Lafitte, my old commander in the slave trade, and whose heart was too tender for that work."

"It was a red flag then with gold wings, and now he has a black field, so he must have turned pirate."

"In fact, I believe I heard he had become a pirate."

"I will signal him who I am, and have him come on board."

So mused Captain Ravello, and having run up his black flag, with the white skull and crossbones in the center, he had his vessel brought to and signaled to the other vessel who he was.

The strange craft soon after ran down near the pirate, and lying to a boat was lowered and put off from her side.

In that boat was Lafitte, just then entering upon the piratical career which in later years made his name so dreaded upon sea and shore.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOLD RESCUE.

WHEN Lafitte stepped upon the deck of the vessel of Ravello, the pirate chief met him at the gangway and greeted him warmly.

A year before, Lafitte had been captain of a slaver, and Ravello was his first-officer.

Giving up the life when he knew its horrors, Lafitte had left Ravello in command of the vessel, and that worthy had stolen the craft from her owners and turned her into a pirate.

Recognizing the vessel, Lafitte, who had also hoisted the sable flag of the sea outlaw, had borne down upon her, as has been seen.

He had looked upon Ravello as a conceited coxcomb, and yet had found him a good officer.

Now, as the two outlaw captains talked together on deck, for Ravello could not ask his visitor into his cabin, suddenly before them appeared Juaquita Mateo.

Ravello, though amazed at her coming, for she had not before appeared upon deck, was more so when he saw her rush up to Lafitte and throw herself upon her knees before him.

"Oh, senor! I pray you, save me!"

"This vessel is not an honest cruiser, as you suppose, but a pirate, and this cruel man means me harm."

"Senor, I claim your aid!"

She had spoken rapidly and earnestly, and her hands had grasped Lafitte's, while her beautiful face was turned upon him appealingly.

A cruel destiny had driven Lafitte to become an outlaw.

He had become a fugitive, for a crime committed in a moment of ungovernable fury.

He had turned to the life of a slaver, and given it up with abhorrence for its cruelty.

Then, drifting with the tide of circumstance, he had fitted out a vessel and armed it, intending to offer his services to some nation struggling against a powerful adversary.

But no opportunity came in his way, and with a crew threatening mutiny, he had raised the black flag.

But Lafitte was courtly as a cavalier of France, brave as a lion, and a champion of woman, and he at once espoused the cause of the beautiful captive.

"Ravello, there is some deep act of villainy here," he said, sternly.

"I conduct my affairs, Senor Captain, to suit myself," was the sharp reply of Ravello.

"This lady demands my protection."

"She is under my care."

"Oh, senor, he is a pirate and has already threatened to make me wed him. I am a captive, stolen from my father's home in Jamaica. If you refuse to aid me, I will die by my own hand."

Lafitte turned again toward Ravello.

"Senor, I give this lady my protection," he said, sternly.

"Hal! this to me on my own deck, Lafitte!"

and drawing his sword, Ravello sprung forward; but Lafitte was as quick as lightning in his movements, and caught the weapon of Ravello upon his own blade, then disarmed him in an instant.

"Ho, lads! Rush on this bold fellow, and cut him down!" shouted the disarmed man.

Lafitte saw his danger. He was alone on the deck of his enemy. His boat was riding the waves a few oar-lengths from the schooner, so as not to be dashed against her sides.

But he also saw that his own men had perceived the quarrel from his vessel, and were rushing to their guns.

Instantly he made up his mind, and seizing Juquita in his strong arms Lafitte ran to the bulwarks and sprung with her into the sea.

"Poor Chita!" broke from the lips of Juquita, as Lafitte went over the side with her; but, as she uttered the name the quadroon, who had been crouching in the companionway, gave a shriek of terror and rushed to the side and also sprung overboard, ere she could be prevented by the surprised pirates.

It was a most critical moment; but the boat's crew had seen the daring of their chief, and were soon alongside of him.

Juquita was drawn into the boat, and Lafitte, a moment after, had seized the drowning quadroon and also handed her over the gunwale.

Then, as he was dragged into the boat his voice was heard in loud command:

"Ho the Destiny! Open fire!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the response, and Lafitte's swift schooner, which was already under way, stood down so as to pass between the small boat and her enemy.

So sudden and unexpected had been the action of Lafitte that he had taken Ravello and his entire crew by surprise; but, as he beheld Lafitte reach the small boat, saw that his schooner was already under way and her men were at the guns, with the boat pulling hard for her, and every prospect of her escape, the pirate was alarmed.

"Fire upon them! Sink the boat! Kill them!" he yelled in a frenzy of rage.

But the men had only their cutlasses and pistols.

The latter they discharged, but with no effect, as the boat was now out of range.

Then they ran for their muskets and sent a rattling fire upon the little launch.

As they did so a broadside from Lafitte's schooner came crashing into them.

This told Ravello that he was being out-generaled by his foe, and he called loudly for his men to go to quarters.

Ere they could return the fire of Lafitte's schooner another broadside hit them hard, and Ravello saw the boat shoot out of sight beyond the hull of his enemy.

The schooner luffed sharp, and soon after the boat hung at the davits, and Lafitte was upon his own deck.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER BORROWED PLUMAGE.

To the great sorrow of Lafitte, when the volley of musketry was fired upon the boat, he had seen Juquita sink forward and lie motionless.

He knew that she was wounded, and he feared that she was dead.

Reaching the vessel, he seized her in his strong arms and carried her to the cabin, while he called out to his first officer:

"Manfred, fight yonder craft to the bitter end, and keep him off, for he has too many men to let him board us."

"I will soon be on deck."

He bore the maiden into the cabin, while Chita followed close to his heels, wringing her hands and weeping, for she deemed her mistress dead, so calm and silent did she lie in the arms of Lafitte.

At the cabin door a negro, deformed and ugly-faced, met Lafitte, and the chief said, quickly:

"Coola, this lady has been wounded, and you must try your skill upon her. Ah! the wound is here in her shoulder, and I believe is not serious."

"Come, my girl, cease your weeping and care for your mistress, for I must go on deck in a moment."

He placed Juquita upon a sofa as he spoke, and bared her shoulder where he saw that her dress was stained.

The bullet had cut its way through, making a painful, but not serious wound, as Lafitte soon discovered, for he examined it with the air of one who understood wounds well.

The negro at once got some bandages, and, with the aid of Chita, who was now calm, the wound was quickly dressed, Juquita opened her eyes and Lafitte hastened on deck, for the battle was now being desperately fought between the two schooners for mastery.

Ravello was deservedly angry at the loss of his fair captive at the hands of his visitor, and was anxious to recapture her.

He had been completely surprised by Lafitte, and his men had seen it, and so was anxious as was their captain to punish the bold rescuer and retake the fair maiden, whose ransom they felt would be very large.

With his men in full sympathy with him, Ravello urged them on to still greater exertion by telling them that Lafitte's schooner was fairly weighted down with treasure.

Then, too, they knew that they were superior in the size of vessels, the number and weight of guns, and that their force was fully one third larger.

So they fought with a determination to win.

On the other hand, the crew of Lafitte felt their inferiority.

They wondered that their captain should take such desperate chances in seizing, as they supposed he had, the maiden, and they were assured that hard knocks alone would be their portion.

When, therefore, Lafitte reached his deck, he found the enemy bearing down upon him, and seemingly every chance in favor of a defeat for him.

Manfred, his first officer, was doing his best; but the pirate lieutenant lacked the power of his chief, and, had all depended upon him, would very soon have struck his colors, with no thought that he could do more than he was doing.

Lafitte's keen eye took in the situation at once, and he saw that if he won, victory must be snatched from the very jaws of defeat.

"Men, do you dare me?"

"Make those guns rattle, or there will be hemp stretched on board this schooner!"

"Beat him off, you dogs, or I'll blow the schooner to atoms!"

The words, uttered in a voice of thunder, and the presence of their chief, had an electrifying effect.

The men had been fighting well, but now they fought like demons.

Lafitte passed along the deck, from stern to stem and back again.

He paused an instant at each gun, and several he sighted himself.

The men threw off their woolen shirts, kicked off their shoes, and went to work with a vengeance.

The result showed that the enemy was surprised, and, unable to withstand the fierce fire, sheered off.

Then the vessel of Lafitte began to fight upon the offensive.

Manfred, a skilled helmsman, took the helm, and, under the eye of his chief, managed the schooner with wondrous dexterity.

The guns kept up a continuous roar, more sail was set even under the hot fire, and those not at the broadsides were ordered to open a fire of musketry.

Not a shot was thrown away, and Ravello felt that he was being beaten.

His weaker foe was proving the more powerful, and, as Lafitte seemed threatening to board, he gave the order to stand away in flight.

This was greeted with a cheer by Lafitte's men, and not daring to board, a hot pursuit was pretended, when in fact the speed of the pursuer was checked purposely.

Manning his bow guns Lafitte opened a hot fire, and the running fight was kept up, Ravello gradually drawing ahead and out of range, and then disappearing from sight in the darkness that settled upon the sea.

The master-spirit had conquered, and the crew, from Manfred down, knew that their chief had held Ravello in his power.

With a stern, triumphant face, Lafitte gave orders about the burial of his dead, and care of the wounded, and then sought the cabin.

He had won, and his conscience repaid him for the good work he had done.

Coola, the deformed negro, had come to him, cool as an icicle in the very midst of the combat, and told him that the senorita had recovered from her swoon and was seemingly quite well, only alarmed at the desperate battle.

Lafitte entered the cabin with a face from which every trace of emotion had passed.

His manner was courtly in the extreme, and he bent low before the beautiful girl as she rose to receive him.

"Lady, I am your surgeon, and you must obey."

"Recline please, and do not attempt to move, for you have just escaped a fatal wound," he said in a voice that was strangely soft and winning.

"Ah, senor, and I have caused you so much of danger, and, I fear me, the sacrifice of many lives, for the battle has been a fearful one?" and Juquita beld forth her hand and grasped that of Lafitte.

"Senorita," he replied, and his Spanish was perfect:

"You have caused me to confront no danger that I would not gladly have faced for your sake, and the loss of life is but the end a brave sailor must expect."

"The man we fought was a pirate, and I boarded his vessel with little thought that I could punish him as I have been enabled to do."

"You claimed my protection, and, nerved to rescue you, my men fought more bravely than they would otherwise have done, and we beat off the foe and caused him to suffer bitterly."

"You are safe, and you have but to tell me where lies your home, and thither I will at once turn the prow of my vessel."

Juquita gazed upon the man before her with a look of admiration which she had never before bent upon another.

A superb form, a face that commanded respect, and won by its manly beauty, she saw, and she was enraptured.

He had taken up the gantlet for her at her request, he had saved her by the boldest act man could be capable of, and, a smaller vessel and force, as she had seen plainly, he yet had beaten off his foe and rescued her.

Who was he, she wondered!

She had asked Coola, but though the African had understood all else she had said to him, he had seemed strangely ignorant upon this subject and she had gained no information.

Strange enough she had not seen the sable flag over the deck of the Destiny, and now, in answer to Lafitte she said:

"Senor, I am the Senorita Juquita Mateo, and my father is a Spanish exile dwelling upon the coast of Jamaica."

"May I ask the name of my gallant preserver?"

The face of Lafitte flushed under the query, and the earnest gaze of the maiden.

He was young in piracy, his name of Lafitte was but little known, then, and feeling that she did not suspect him as being who he was, he determined to deceive her.

Why should he tell her that she had escaped from one pirate's power by the act of another?

So he thought, and so he decided to wear honored plumage for the occasion.

"Senorita," he said in his low, rich voice:

"I am but an humble commander in the service of Mexico; an American by birth my name is Achille Latour, and I assure you I am as glad to have served you, as I am that I was enabled to punish your kidnapper."

"My vessel shall be at once headed for your home if you will give me particulars as to where you reside."

And under his honored plumage, as an honorable officer in an honorable service, Lafitte the Pirate knew not the harm he was guilty of, for at last had Juquita Mateo met her beau ideal of manhood in the one who had so bravely rescued her.

Had she then known that he was an outlaw, branded as a buccaneer upon land and sea, she would have shut her heart against loving him; but, not knowing it, she allowed her love to have full sway and she was happy in believing that she could win him, as she had others.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN.

DON MARCO MATEO was pacing to and fro, upon the broad piazza of his elegant home, when his face brightened as he beheld a sail standing into the bay.

It was just sunset, a week after the capture of his daughter by Ravello the Rover, and the face of the Don was haggard and full of sorrow.

He was a handsome man of fifty, with a soldierly bearing, and a stern, intelligent face.

The hair on his temples was white, and his mustache was iron-gray; but still he was well-preserved for his years.

A courtier and a gentleman, possessed of great wealth, in spite of his being an exile, he was sought after by the prominent residents of the island, and the officers of the army and navy were only too happy in being invited to Castle d'Espagna, as his villa was called.

When word had come to him that a vessel,

flying the American flag had fired upon his yacht, in which were his daughter, her maid and Jaco, he could hardly believe his senses.

Then the truth came out, from a negro who saw all, and had been told by Jaco just what he meant to do for revenge.

Knowing that the vessel was a pirate and not an American cruiser, Don Marco was nearly crazed with grief.

He dispatched couriers to the forts with the news, and sent word to the ports where vessels-of-war were lying.

More he could not do, and so he waited, knowing that half a dozen fleet craft had been dispatched in search of the buccaneer kidnapper of his idol, for Juquita was all in all to the exile.

Thus the days had passed, and no news had come to the sorrowing man.

Not one of the vessels had returned, and the young officers who happened to be in command, were only too anxious to rescue Juquita from the power of a cruel pirate, or visit upon him a fearful revenge, and thus they spread sail upon their vessels and sought Ravello the seas over.

Now as Don Marco paced the piazza, hollow-eyed, sorrowing, sleepless for days and nights, his face brightened as he beheld the vessel standing into the bay.

His voice soon aroused the servants, and a glass was turned upon the incoming craft.

No vessel ever came into the obscure little harbor unless it happened to be a coast guard, or a cruiser whose commander was wont to stop for a visit to the exile.

"The craft is armed, and she flies the Mexican flag."

"But that accursed pirate floated the American colors," and he gritted the last words between his teeth.

"She is a pretty vessel," he continued, "sails well, and has the appearance of having been roughly handled—ah! now I get a view of her quarter-deck—God in Heaven! my child! my child!"

The eyes of Don Marco had fallen upon a fair form upon the deck of the schooner, just led from the cabin by a tall officer in uniform.

At a glance he had recognized her through his glass, and yet, as she seemed to lean heavily upon the arm of the officer, she appeared to be weak and suffering.

Behind her came Chita, and Don Marco thought there was no mistake, his child had returned.

But the vessel? She was not the pirate craft, that was certain, for so said a dozen servants who had seen Ravello's schooner.

She was not one of the English cruisers either, for Don Marco knew them all, and this one carried the Mexican flag.

Down the walk to the shore he hastened, followed by his servants, and reaching the little pier, he saw that Juquita was directing the course of the vessel, as she stood under shortened sail toward an anchorage.

The anchor was now let fall, then a boat left the side, and a few moments after there sprang out upon the pier the tall form of Lafitte, and he almost lifted from the boat Juquita.

With a glad cry the Spaniard clasped her in his arms, and for a moment no word was said:

Then Juquita turned to Lafitte and said:

"Captain Latour, I wish to present you to my father, that you may make known to him how you saved me from a cruel pirate."

"Father, Captain Latour is a commander of the Mexican Navy, and to him I owe more than life."

Don Marco grasped the hand of the supposed Mexican, and poured out his thanks in a torrent of words; but Lafitte would only say that he had met Ravello and had thus been enabled to serve the Senorita Juquita.

"You must be my guest, Senor Captain, so come with me at once to the villa," urged Don Marco.

But Lafitte was firm in his refusal of the Don's hospitality.

His vessel had to be repaired, he said, and at once, and he would pay his respects upon the morrow.

The truth was Lafitte knew well the danger of being recognized by any officer who might have met his vessel, and he was anxious to get the schooner in perfect trim at once, for, after having his fight with Ravello, they had been caught in a fearful storm, which had blown them off their course and further damaged the craft.

So Don Marco went on to his villa with Juquita who was quite weak from loss of blood, and suffering from the shock she had received.

That night, as she reclined upon a lounge in

her own room, her father sat by her side and heard the story of Jaco's treachery and all that had followed.

The bold rescue of her from Ravello annoyed the Don, with its daring, while he asked:

"But what was the Mexican captain doing on board the pirate?"

"He recognized in the pirate captain, one who had served with him as an officer, father, and knowing how superior the outlaw's vessel and crew were to his own, he was willing to palliate him, and hence made the visit."

"And yet, in the face of this, he boldly secured you and beat off the pirate."

"Captain Latour is a wonderful man, my child, and my lifelong gratitude is his," said the Don earnestly.

"And mine, father," and Juquita meant all that she said, for she had already felt that Lafitte was the one man in the world to her.

CHAPTER XI.

A RIVAL.

THE schooner Lafitte remained several days in the little harbor, under the shadow of the Don's villa.

In that time she was put in perfect trim by her crew, and though Lafitte was kept busy, he yet had time to dine each day up at the villa.

The more the Don saw of him, the more he respected and admired the handsome, stern-faced young man.

Though an American, Lafitte spoke Spanish perfectly, and he had traveled and seen much of the world.

He gave the Don to understand that he was an exile from his country, and that a grief went with that exiling, and thus the two felt a deep sympathy for each other.

Lafitte was a brilliant conversationalist, and had seen much of the world, and so the Don was charmed with him, while Juquita became more and more in love with her daring rescuer.

In those days it was no easy task to find out what vessels were in a nation's navy, and not for an instant was there any doubt as to Lafitte being other than he represented himself.

The different cruisers that had gone in search of Ravello returned one by one, with the same story to tell, and their commanders were deeply chagrined to learn of the success of a Mexican captain in rescuing Juquita.

But there was one thorn in the side of Juquita, and that was the fact that she had been pledged to a young American officer.

She had liked and admired him, in fact had believed herself in love with him until she had met Lafitte.

He was known to be a man of wealth, was a handsome, dashing fellow, and had one day rescued the Don and Juquita from a wreck, for a vessel in which they had sailed from New York to their home, had been caught in a storm and dismantled.

Had not the American brig-of-war appeared, all would have gone down with the wreck, which was leaking badly, while every boat had been lost.

The ten days that Juquita was a guest, with her father, upon the brig, had caused the young American captain to lose his heart completely to her, and some months after, as his visits at the villa became as frequent as his cruising orders would, admit, the maiden had been pledged to him, though the engagement was kept a secret.

Several days after the departure of Lafitte's vessel from the bay the American brig-of-war arrived, and her commander, Captain De Latour heard of Juquita's capture and rescue.

Though thankful in his heart for her safety, he was envious because another had been her rescuer, and as both the Don and the maiden dwelt upon the splendid appearance of the Mexican officer, as they believed him, and his courage, they soon had the young American fairly mad with jealousy.

He could not but also see that Juquita was cold toward him, and after a visit of a couple of days he departed with hatred in his heart for all Mexicans.

"Latour, she called him, and they said he was an American in the Mexican service."

"Can it be that it is—no, no! for he was certainly killed in South America, and the name is only a coincidence."

"My God! what if it should be he?"

"What if he should not be dead?"

"It is a fearful thought, but after what I have suffered there is no mercy now in my heart for him, and, if he stood in my path, I would kill him as I would a snake."

"I will run into a Mexican port and find out all I can about this Captain Latour, for much I

fear me his splendid appearance and gallant rescue have won from me the love of Juquita."

"But it must not be, for I lost Mercedes, and now, when that wound is healed by meeting with Juquita, I must not give her up."

"No, no, I cannot give her up, and were this Mexican proven to be the man whom I almost suspect him of being, I would strike him to the heart ere he should rob me of Juquita."

"I will go to Mexico and solve the riddle to my own satisfaction."

So said the young American commander, as he stood upon the quarter-deck of his brig, and headed out of the little bay.

Once in the open sea and he gave the order to lay the course for Vera Cruz.

The story of Juquita's rescue by a "Captain Latour" had brought up bitter memories in his past life, and he was determined to solve the secret if the Mexican captain was one who had wronged him in the past beyond all forgiveness.

CHAPTER XII.

DENOUNCED.

THE schooner Destiny, strangely named by her outlaw commander, had not been a stranger in the little bay near the exile's villa, since the time she had borne Juquita back to her home out of the clutches of Ravello the Rover.

The stern faced commander had become deeply interested in the beautiful maiden.

Though a pirate—though it is a paradox to say so—he was yet a man of honor, and he sought not to win the love of Juquita to blast it.

He felt that she was becoming very dear to him, and yet, within his heart, was one love, forever locked there, and the key of that love had been thrown away by his own mad act in the past.

No other woman could hold the place in his heart which that one had held, and still held; but she, being lost to him forever, he allowed the affection of Juquita to twine about him as a vine about a bare and worthless thing.

That she loved him he knew, and her father had told him that she was pledged to another.

The name of that other he did not even know, nor did he care.

He had made up his mind to go again to the villa.

He would seek a private interview with Juquita, and he would tell her how he had deceived her.

He would tell her that in the far past his name had been Achilles Latour, but that he had changed it to another—was, in fact, none other than Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf.

Then he would tell her to keep his secret from all others, and bid her farewell forever.

Such was the determination of Lafitte, as his pretty vessel stood in toward the villa anchorage.

The sun was still above the horizon, and he beheld a fair form standing upon the hillside, waving her kerchief to him.

He landed, and upon his way up to the villa was met by Juquita.

She greeted him in a manner that showed plainly she could not conceal her love for him.

He saw that she loved him more and more, and a pang of regret entered his heart that he should have to give her up, that he would have to shatter her idol, and prove to her that he was but basest clay.

"Juquita," he said, as they walked together toward the villa, following the winding path through the bowers of foliage.

"Juquita, I have come to tell you a secret."

Was not that secret what she already knew—that he loved her?

So she thought, and she trembled as he continued:

"I have come to tell you a secret, and yet, to prove to you how bitter it will be to make known to you all that I have to, I will just tell you that I love you."

With a glad cry she turned toward him, and a creature of impulse, threw her arms about his neck, pressing her lips to his.

What need she know more than that he loved her?

He had halted, and was bending over her when he uttered the words, and so she read his love in his eyes.

He loved her, and that was all that she then need know.

What more he would have said was interrupted by the sound of voices, and he said quickly:

"Not now, but to-night I will tell you all."

Then they walked on to suddenly come upon

Don Marco and several young officers from the fort.

The Don greeted Lafitte most kindly, presented him to his other guests, and, as they all went toward the villa said:

"I heard just now of the arrival of your schooner, Captain Latour, and was delighted to know that we should name you for a guest to-night."

Back to the villa they went, and, as the twilight darkened into night dinner was announced and all adjourned from the piazza to the dining-room.

There Lafitte was the life of the party.

He had never appeared so fascinating to Juaquita, and the Don saw at last that he was certainly a dangerous rival of the young American captain.

Somehow the story of Juaquita's engagement to Captain De La Tour had leaked out, but the young officers did not cease going to the villa on that account.

While she was unmarried they had hope, and then besides, the Don's dinners were something to remember, and hope to enjoy again.

Thus it was that the villa often had guests.

In the presence of the fascinating Mexican, the three English officers wisely kept quiet and listened, charmed in spite of themselves.

Then the dinner ended, and all went once more to the broad piazza.

Soon there was heard the approach of wheels upon the gravel drive.

They came at a rapid pace, and drawing up before the broad steps of the villa, a man sprung from a *volante*.

He was in full uniform, and, as he ascended the steps, Juaquita said, faintly:

"Captain De La Tour."

The light from the hallway fell full upon him, and a word, as of surprise, broke from Lafitte's lips as he beheld him.

An instant the young American appeared in the light, and then he strode forward to the group on the piazza, seated in the darkness, excepting the starlight.

The Don arose to greet him, slightly embarrassed by the fact that Lafitte, whom he now knew that his daughter loved, was present.

"Don Marco Mateo, you have as guest here one who is under false colors, for I denounce that man as Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf," said the young American officer, in a voice that fairly quivered with emotion.

"No! no! no! it is false!" cried Juaquita, springing to the side of Lafitte.

"It is true."

"I have deceived you, Juaquita, for I am the pirate, Lafitte," was the stern response of the outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHILD OF THE SEA.

WHEN Lafitte had expected to see Juaquita shrink from him in horror, she did not do so, but drew closer, while she said in a low, earnest tone, that showed her intense love for the man:

"Be you what you may, I love you, and you have said that you loved me."

"I do, Juaquita, and, even after your confession, will prove that love by leaving you forever."

"Hold! I arrest you, Lafitte, the Pirate!" and as Lafitte turned, Captain De La Tour sprung forward with drawn sword.

The weapon of Lafitte fairly leaped from its scabbard, and, as it crossed that of the American officer, it sent the blade flying twenty feet away.

With a bitter imprecation De La Tour drew a pistol to fire, but Juaquita threw herself into the arms of Lafitte thus shielding him, while she cried:

"Fly! fly for your life, and do not remain here to let them capture and hang you!"

"I will go, Juaquita, and God bless you," was the low response.

"You go not alone, for I go with you," came the determined response, and, with the maiden clinging to him, Lafitte began to retreat from the villa down the pathway toward his vessel.

But, aroused by the young American, the British officers also pressed forward to make Lafitte a prisoner, while Don Marco, in dismay, alarm and sorrow, seemed to be devoid of action or speech.

"There come the troopers," cried De La Tour.

"Now we will have him!"

As he spoke they heard the sound of hoofs, for Captain De La Tour had gone by the fort and asked to have a guard sent in all haste to the villa.

Hearing the hoofs, as he retreated slowly, his sword drawn, and with Juaquita clinging to him, the voice of the pirate captain rung out in the still night like a bugle:

"Ho, the Destiny! Help here, lads!"

A cheer came from the schooner's decks, and this made the American and English officers but the more anxious to capture Lafitte before help arrived from the vessel.

So together they rushed upon the daring outlaw.

With Juaquita clinging about him, they dared not fire; but they could use their swords.

But there was a flash, and one of the British officers sunk in his tracks.

Then there was the clash of steel, as Lafitte's blade met that of an Englishman, and next, with a groan of anguish a man dropped to his knees, his right hand severed from his wrist, while there was heard the words of the pirate chief:

"Don't press me, if you value life!"

Even the daring young American officer shrunk back before the deadly blade of Lafitte, and the latter hastened on down the path toward the bay.

Then the troopers dashed up and were ordered to dismount and press forward.

This they did, and, hampered by Juaquita, who still clung to him, Lafitte's retreat was slow, and they were almost upon him, when his voice thundered forth:

"Where are you, lads? I need you!"

"Here, chief!" came the reply, and a score of men dashed up the hill.

Instantly the fight began between the sailors and the troopers, Lafitte calling out to his men to use only their cutlasses when pressed and to fall back slowly.

They obeyed; the troopers became cautious after once greeted with the weight of pirate cutlasses, and the two boats were reached and pushed off for the schooner.

Shots were fired at the boat, which Lafitte and Juaquita were known not to be in, and several lives were lost; but the boats reached the schooner's side, and were soon swung at the davits.

Then the anchor was gotten up, sail set, and the *Destiny* went swiftly on her way out of the little bay.

And Juaquita?

With her love for Lafitte conquering all other affection, she stood on the deck by his side, ready to bid farewell forever to her father and her home!

She had seen the man she loved in deadly danger, and her admiration had been increased for him as he soared grandly above his enemies.

He had said that he was Lafitte the Pirate; but she loved him, and she would not leave him.

So the schooner's course was laid for a small port, where Lafitte knew a priest could be found, and Juaquita Mateo was made willingly a pirate's bride.

In her heart there was a hope that she would win Lafitte from his wicked life, and she determined to do all in her power to accomplish that end.

But weeks made months, and a year had gone by, and still her stern husband sailed the seas under his black flag with its golden rings.

He had said to her that some day, when he had made a fortune, he would give up his life of piracy and settle down in some land to make her happy.

But alas! poor Juaquita never lived to behold his promise kept, for, one night of fearful storm she gave birth to a baby boy, and her own life was the sacrifice.

An old negress and Coola devoted themselves to the care of the little boy, and the poor wife and mother were buried by night in the blue depths of the Gulf.

Thus was Lafitte left with his infant son, the only anchor to bind him to life, and his heart to mourn bitterly for poor Juaquita, who had sacrificed all for him.

Did he then give up his wild, sinful life upon the sea?

Ah, no! for he seemed the more to seek desperate danger to drown memories of the past that would ever haunt him, and Leo, his child of the sea, was reared upon an outlaw deck, growing up to feel that he was a pirate's son.

Such was a part of the story of Lafitte's life, which he had written out for Leo, and given him in the package with his Legacy, the day of his fatal battle with the brig-of-war.

But there is more to tell, and it will be made known as my story is developed, and it is shown how Leo carried out the last words of his pirate father.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

WHEN the schooner *Destiny*, who had gone down with her sable colors flying, her guns fighting to the last, under her stern commander Lafitte, had disappeared beneath the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, there was a hush upon the sea.

The British brig-of-war *Vulture*, was but a few cables' length away, and when her plucky foe disappeared from sight, her guns ceased their roar.

When the word was heard that the pirate was sunk, even the groans of the many wounded men upon the brig were hushed.

The cheer of victory was subdued in sound, and the gallant tars looked at each other in admiration of a gallant foe, pirate though he was.

After the red glare of the guns had ceased, the sea looked as though a black mantle had been thrown over it, so black was it.

But out of that gulf of waters arose struggling forms, men who had been swept from the deck as the vessel sunk.

Here, there and elsewhere there was a man struggling for life in the mad waters, struggling for life, and yet knowing that there seemed but one succor near, the brig, and rescue by her meant death upon the yard-arm.

As some thought of this they strove no more for life, but sunk calmly beneath the waves.

"Master Leo, no see chief."

The one who spoke the words was Coola, the African slave of Lafitte, he who had been true as steel to the outlaw.

The one he addressed was Leo Lafitte, the pirate's son, and the two had risen from the vortex of waters and met there together buffeting the waves.

"No, I have looked everywhere about and called, but he is gone," was Leo's reply.

"Chief nun want to die; but tell me don't let Master Leo die," said Coola.

"Chances are very slim for life here, Coola."

"No, chance good."

"See, yonder land, not mile 'way."

"Come."

"And the chief?"

"Dead."

"Let us be sure."

They looked about among the few struggling men, and then Coola said:

"Chief dead! Die game."

"We live. Come!"

He started off with a bold stroke as he spoke, and Leo followed him, both running strong and fast.

A short distance off they beheld the brig-of-war lowering her boats, to pick up those who might not have gone down with the schooner, and those who clung to life swam toward the chance of rescue offered, though dreading that it would be to meet their fate at the yard-arm.

The brig was crippled by the fierce fire of the schooner, and either humanity or a desire to hang the pirates who survived the going down of the *Destiny*, urged the English commander to send rescue.

But Leo and the African swam not toward the brig.

The negro had struck the key-note of safety to the youth when he had pointed toward the land and said that it was not a mile away.

So the two struck out boldly for the shore.

Hampered by their clothing, it would have been a struggle with death all the way to two less expert swimmers than were the youth and the African.

But the negro was as much at home in the water as upon land, it seemed, and Leo had been noted among the schooner's crew for his wonderful powers of endurance in swimming.

So, with strong, steady movement they went on their way, Coola keeping close to the side of the youth.

Glancing back now and then, they saw that the boats' crews had picked up a few of the men, and returned to the brig, which now burned a blue light.

The glare showed some floating debris upon the waters, but the crew, excepting the few saved by the boats, had been engulfed with the pirate vessel.

"My poor father," came aloud from the lips of Leo, as he swam steadily on.

He had dearly loved the stern man whom he knew to be his father, and had never remembered an unkind word from him.

Never having known a mother, Leo had found his father his only kindred, and he had been thus drawn to him the more.

It is true he had never been taught to show affection, and Lafitte had never petted the boy;

but Leo knew how dearly he loved him, as had been evidenced in many ways.

Alone with Lafitte, the youth called him father, but in the presence of others, and when on duty, he always addressed him by his title, and was as ceremonious with him as any of the chief's officers were.

The schooner had been Leo's sea home, the island stronghold the only haven ashore he had known.

Born upon the sea, reared upon the blue waters, and with his father and the crew his only comrades, it was a bitter, cruel grief to the lad to feel that all were gone.

It is true that many a time Leo had landed in foreign ports with his father, and weeks had been passed amid the gayeties of Havana and other seaports about the world; but nothing had ever won the young pirate from his love of the vessel and her men.

With no one to prove to him the enormity of this crime of piracy, Leo had not felt that he was such a sinner, and it had been only during his stay in New Orleans, when his father lay wounded in the convent, after the battle, that he had come to know how the name of Lafitte was regarded on sea and land, feared and hated.

The wound which his father had received, Leo had seen given.

It was not from a British rifle or pistol, but from an officer in American naval dress, who had landed, sought Lafitte out and fired upon him.

The bold officer could have been shot down ere he sprung again into his boat and rowed away, but Leo remembered his father's words, to let him go, not to fire upon him or pursue, for he had cause for his act.

Whether the papers he had with him would clear up this mystery, Leo did not know; but he hoped that they would, for he wondered who was the stranger in uniform, whom his father allowed to escape after giving him, as was then believed by all, his death-wound.

Then there was another thing that puzzled Leo.

That was what the tie could be between his father and the beautiful nun, Sister Mercedes, at the convent where the chief had been taken when wounded.

Strange it seemed to Leo, as he swam shoreward that night, that all these thoughts trooped up before him like phantoms at such a moment.

But he kept up his steady stroke, and Coola swam close by his side until at last the land was reached—a strange Destiny had saved the son of Lafitte from death on that fateful night, when the schooner went down into the depths of the Gulf.

CHAPTER XV.

A SABLE SATAN.

THE first act of both Leo and Coola, upon reaching the shore, was to throw themselves down to rest.

The tax upon them had been a severe one, for Leo had clung to his sword and weapons throughout, and Coola, with his native cunning, had prepared for their escape, when the schooner should go down, by gathering together some food, clothing and other things, and making a compact bundle of them, which he wrapped in waterproof cloth to protect them from wetting.

This bundle he had prepared, hoping that the chief would also escape, and he had clung to it throughout the swim to the shore.

After a short rest they arose and walked inland, reaching a headland from whence the brig could be seen, slowly standing inshore, evidently with the intention of repairing damages and awaiting to view the scene by daylight.

"We must not be found in this neighborhood, Coola, so we will have to walk for it," said Leo.

"Walk quick," replied Coola, and shouldering his bundle he started off along the shore.

"Which way, Coola?"

"Yonder."

"You know where you are?"

"Schooner land here once for water, see, spring yonder."

"Down coast little bit of city."

"A village?"

"Yes, master."

"It would hardly be safe to go there."

"No stay there, not be seen."

"Find boat there and go to sea."

"You are right, Coola, for we will be safe upon the sea at least."

So saying Leo trudged on after the black and thus several miles were passed over, when, as

Coola had stated, several glimmering lights came in view, which betokened a hamlet near.

They soon came to a small bay, or inlet, and upon the further shore were a number of humble homes, for the place was but a poor seaport.

There were on the shore of the inlet a number of boats, and at anchor some half dozen small craft, from schooners to cat-rigs.

The negro placed his bundle upon the ground, and said:

"Master wait; Coola get vessel."

"Don't use that ugly knife of yours, Coola, unless you have to, as a little gold will get a craft for us," said Leo, as the negro waded into the water.

"Coola no kill 'less have to kill," was the quiet response, and soon the negro was swimming out into the inlet.

From craft to craft he swam, taking a close observation of each, and making not the slightest sound in the water.

In that secluded haven no watch was kept on board the little vessels, and Leo doubted if even there was a man sleeping on any of the craft.

At last Coola seemed to have selected a craft that suited him best, for he clambered up over the bows, and squatted upon the bowsprit while the water dripped from him, and he took a view of the deck.

A minute's halt and he moved slowly aft.

The craft was a little sloop of twenty tons, trimly built, and even in the darkness appeared to possess indications of speed and seaworthiness.

The forward hatch was open, and down this Coola peered and listened.

No sound reached his ears and he passed on to the cabin, the companionway of which was open.

There he halted and the sound of breathing within was distinctly heard.

For a moment he paused and then boldly entered, after having made some changes in his appearance. A moment later a greenish light pervaded the cabin, and two men sleeping there awoke with a start.

What they beheld was enough to strike terror to the stoutest heart.

Coola was dressed in red velvet, which was now however wet, and clinging to his form.

Upon his head he had fastened two horns, which gave him a most Satanic look, and he had otherwise made up his hideous frame and face to strike horror to the one who had beheld him.

The men on the schooner had always regarded the negro as the ally of Satan, and when, as he now and then had taken a notion to rig out as a counterpart of his Satanic Majesty, they had really been terrified, and had begged Lafitte to load him with chains and throw him into the sea; but, the chief had allowed Coola to do pretty much as he pleased, and had always protected him, threatening that if harm befell his slave through treachery, he would hang every man upon whom suspicion fell.

Coola had now dressed himself up as best he could, in his Satanic attire, and dripping wet as he was, it was not to be wondered at that the two occupants of the little cabin, suddenly awakened from their sleep, felt that they beheld the devil before them.

The weird light which Coola burned, and had carefully preserved from getting wet, showed him in all his appalling ugliness.

The men, humble, ignorant sailors, looked at each other to see if they were awake, or were suffering from hideous nightmare.

But Coola did not allow them an instant to consider, for he said, in his deep tones, like muffled thunder:

"Obey, and you live and get gold. Disobey, and you suffer! Stay where you are until I call you."

There was no need of telling them to do this, for they were devoid of motion almost, and lay still, except for their trembling, and chattering teeth.

Then the greenish light went out and Coola disappeared from the cabin, closing the companionway after him.

It did not take him long then to haul up the little anchor, and, with a large sweep found on deck, to force the craft in toward the shore where Leo stood, anxiously awaiting.

The youth waded out, carrying Coola's bundle and his own things, and sprung upon the deck.

"Tide run out, drift to sea," said Coola in a whisper.

Slowly the little sloop then went out with the tide, just turning on its ebb, and gathering speed as it went along, was soon borne out of the inlet into the open water.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLOTTERS.

WITHOUT a word, other than the splash of the sweep, with which Coola held the sloop on her way out of the inlet, the craft swept out by the rest of the little fleet and reached the open water half a league away.

There Coola laid aside his huge oar and told Leo how he had captured the sloop.

"And there are men now on board?" asked the youth with amazement.

"Yes, master."

"In the hold, or in the cabin?"

"In cabin."

"Bound, of course?"

"No, master."

"Strange they do not resist."

"Too much scare."

"Ah! I don't wonder, when you play the devil, Coola."

"You are enough to frighten a priest; but, we will get them out and let them set sail, while I will pay them well to run us to New Orleans."

"No pay gold, if don't want, master."

"You mean we could toss the men overboard and seize their craft?"

"Yes, master."

"No, Coola, we will do them no harm, for they have done us no wrong. You are too cruel, and I wish you not to be so. Strike when we must, but spare when we can, must govern us."

"Do as master says," was the reply of the negro, who fairly idolized Leo.

"All right, throw open the companionway and tell the men to come on deck."

Coola obeyed, and after some delay a form appeared.

The man dropped upon his knees and with clasped hands began to mutter prayers for his life in Spanish.

"Good Senor Satan, spare a poor wretch who has never harmed his fellow-man, and—"

"Come, my man, quit that nonsense, for I wish to speak with you."

The man's eyes had been upon Coola.

Now the voice of Leo caused him to bend his gaze upon him.

He seemed to gain confidence at once, and said:

"Oh, senor, you will protect me?"

"I will protect you, yes, and pay you too for your services."

"How many comrades are here with you?"

"My brother, who is too much frightened to come on deck."

"He shall not be harmed, for my slave here only masqueraded to seize your craft and cause no alarm."

"It was but to keep you silent from fear, rather than to silence you with cold steel."

"I need your craft to run to New Orleans, and I will pay you two hundred pesos for the trip."

"If you serve me well, good; if you attempt treachery, you go into the sea."

"Call your brother on deck and set sail, for I am anxious to be well away from here by dawn."

The man listened attentively to all that Leo said.

He realized that they had been terrified into submission, and his delight that the devil himself had not paid him a visit knew no bounds.

"Oh, senor, I will serve you, and gladly."

"I will seek my brother, and tell him your words."

But the brother had heard all.

He had his head in the companionway listening, while he muttered prayers for their safety.

But with confidence in Leo, and the hope of two hundred pesos, they were very happy, and set to work with a will, hoisting sail and getting the little sloop on her course.

They told Leo that Coola had been wise in his selection, for their craft was the fleetest of the little port, and had been victualled the evening before for a short cruise after a cargo, they intending to start in the morning early.

"Then your absence, will attract no attention, and that is well," said Leo, as he saw the little sloop bounding along under an eight-knot breeze.

Worn out with the severe strain upon them both, Leo and Coola lay down to sleep; but the latter slept like Napoleon, with one eye open, and the two men felt it was upon them, so refrained from any act to get back their craft, if they had formed any such intention.

When Leo awoke the sun was rising, and the sloop was on a northerly course, heading for the delta of the Mississippi.

The craft sailed well, and threw the knots in

her wake in a manner that told Coola how good a selection he had made.

The two brothers seemed content at the prospect of making two hundred pesos, but Leo saw that their faces were stamped with evil, and felt assured that if they could they would seize the vessel, for they could not but feel that he had considerable gold with him, when he was willing to pay them so handsomely for their services and the use of their craft.

The suspicion that they would try and kill him and Coola did they get the shadow of a chance, caused Leo to tell the negro to watch them closely, as he would do.

Under other circumstances the two seamen might have proven honest.

But the scare which Coola had given them made them revengeful.

Then too they thought if Leo had two hundred pesos to give them he must have far more.

They saw jewels that he wore, and they were at heart great villains, for they were coasters, smugglers or pirates as the occasion offered.

Why they should not have all they could not understand.

They had not seen a specimen of Coola's great strength, nor knew the courage of Leo, or they might have been more cautious.

But they did not believe that they were suspected, and therefore felt that they had it in their power to enrich themselves.

So, as the negro and the youth slept, they talked together in low tones and plotted.

They arranged then the plan to carry out their plot that night, and it was well arranged, for they were first to throw Coola overboard and then rush upon Leo and put an end to him in the same way, leaving them to drown, while the sloop held on her way.

CHAPTER XVII.

MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

THE more the two men on the sloop thought over their plot, to get rid of the youth and the African, the more they felt convinced that it would come out all right.

They had seen Leo and Coola deposit their weapons and the bundle in the cabin, and felt sure that what treasures they had was among those things.

For upon Coola they did not expect to find any gold or jewels, and he would go overboard at once, they decided.

But Leo could be seized, held and robbed, after which he too should go into the sea.

They were both powerful men, and had no fear of not being able to handle the deformed African and tall slender youth.

So they abided their time until nightfall, when Coola going aft just before sunset, caused them to at once decide to act.

Calling him to them, under some pretext, they suddenly seized him in their strong grasp.

Coola was taken by surprise, for he had not expected treachery then, looking for it, if they intended it, when he and his young master were asleep.

But he grasped also the two men, and feeling that his best chance was the water, for a struggle, not only aided them in throwing him overboard, but carried them with him.

The loud plunge aroused Leo, who was seated forward, and at the same instant the sloop left with no hand upon the tiller, swept up into the wind.

Running aft Leo beheld a mass of humanity struggling in the sea, and then it disappeared.

He quickly lashed the tiller, and then sprang upon the bulwark to jump into the sea and go to the aid of Coola, when he saw a form appear from beneath the waters.

It was one of the treacherous brothers and his face was white with fear.

But Coola and the other were nowhere visible.

"Ho, my man, swim to the sloop!" cried Leo, as he saw that the man appeared bewildered.

"You will kill me," he assured.

"No, though you deserve it," was the reply. The man felt that it was certain death in the sea, and a chance if he went to the sloop.

He must trust to Leo's word, or die in the waters.

Having replied to the man Leo began to search for Coola and the other brother.

He knew well how long Coola could remain under water, and aware of the great strength of the negro, he hoped that he was holding his enemy beneath the surface to kill him.

But then he feared that a knife might have been used upon Coola, and he called out:

"Did you knife my slave?"

The man paused in his swimming and replied: "No, we were unarmed, and he seized us and sprung overboard."

"Caramba! but he is the devil!"

"Did you not attack him first?"

"Oh no, never."

Leo felt that the man was lying; but ere he could respond, suddenly he heard a shriek, and beheld the black form of Coola rise from the sea directly in front of the appalled seaman.

One breath of air seemed enough for Coola, who seized the treacherous sailor in his arms and dragged him out of sight below the surface of the waters, which rushing into his mouth choked off his wild cries.

Leo had shouted to the negro; but Coola either did not hear, or hearing, did not heed, and the two disappeared from sight.

It was a great relief however to Leo to feel that the African was not dead as he had feared, and anxiously he stood upon the bulwarks watching for his reappearance, for he felt that the doom of the Mexican sailor was sealed.

The sloop rocked upon the waves, the sails fluttering wildly, and the sea breaking upon her deck, but Leo heeded not this, and scanned the waters for the reappearance of the slave.

It seemed an age to the watching, waiting youth. It seemed that no human being could live so long beneath the waters.

But at last, just as he had given up all hope of ever beholding Coola again, he saw him rise far out upon the waves.

The sloop had no boat, and Leo plainly perceived that the African's strength was almost gone; so he plunged at once into the water and swam rapidly toward his faithful servitor.

He reached the negro just in time, for even his giant strength and endurance had given out.

"Come, Coola, I can bear you up," he said, cheerily.

Coola could make no reply, and hardly had strength to cling to the youth.

The African was like one dead, and, as Leo beheld the sloop some distance away, he felt that it would be a struggle for life and death to reach it.

But he exerted his strength to the utmost and swam slowly on.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the craft, but weaker and weaker he became.

A few more yards and he would reach the sloop.

Had he the strength?

Coola now seemed wholly unconscious, and so could give no aid; but Leo was not the one to succumb while an atom of strength lasted.

So he made another desperate struggle and reached the sloop's side.

He had taken the precaution to throw several rope-ends over the lee of the little craft, and when he grasped one of these his strength was gone.

But he clung to it for a moment until he could recuperate, and then he made it fast around the African.

Again he rested, and then seizing another rope, by a master effort drew himself on board the sloop.

For a few moments he lay there panting and prostrated; but nerving himself again he drew the negro upon the deck.

Then a shout of triumph burst from the lips of the brave youth—he had mastered death after a desperate struggle.

It was a long time before he was rested, and darkness had fallen upon the sea.

Then he arose and looked to Coola, who was slowly recovering, for he had had a very close call with his two desperate struggles with the treacherous sailors of the sloop.

"Coola feel good now."

"He die, if master not save him," said the negro, in a low tone, and Leo grasped his hand warmly, for he had feared that the African had received some bodily injury.

"Did they attack you, Coola?" he asked, after a while.

"Yes, take me by throat and arms, to throw Coola into sea."

"Coola go, but take them with him, and drown both, though they swim like shark."

"Coola's knife got lost, or not take so long time for men to die."

"Master no come to Coola, he die."

"Coola die for master some time."

"No, live for me, Coola, and it will suit me best; but now we will eat some supper and then lay on our course once more," and half an hour after the little sloop was again bounding over the waves, her young skipper and the African masters of the situation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT WAS OVERHEARD.

WITHOUT further adventure, the little sloop reached the Delta, and ran into the Mississippi River just at dawn.

It was the intention of Leo to dispose of the sloop upon his arrival in New Orleans, and then to seek Governor Claiborne and make known to him the sad death of his father, at the same time discovering if a pardon had been obtained for Lafitte and those who had fought with him in the battle.

If so, Leo was anxious to get a commission to arm and equip a vessel to go in search of Ricardo.

He looked upon Ricardo as a traitor to Lafitte and the direct cause of his death, and the loss of his schooner with those on board.

He was revengeful, and hoped to be able to run down Ricardo and carry him and his vessel as a prize to the governor, after which he hoped to lead an honorable life.

The papers of his father, Lafitte's Legacy, in fact, he had not looked at, though he had carefully preserved them from getting wet.

What they would reveal to him he could only conjecture, and he sought not to know until he had a good opportunity to read what was written unmolested and in safety.

When darkness fell upon the river the sloop was yet several miles away from the city, and slowly sailing along under a light breeze.

Suddenly, upon rounding a bend, a small craft came in sight, anchored close inshore.

As the sloop passed near, it was evidently not yet seen by those on board the little schooner, for a voice said, so that every word reached the ears of Leo and Coola:

"The boat ought to be here soon, mates, and if Cap'n Dick has got the gal, then we've made a rich haul on this run."

"If they has her, Mate Norton, then her folks has got ter pay big ter git her back or I does not know Cap'n Dick, said another speaker."

The flap of a sail then, on the sloop, attracted attention on board the schooner, and Leo heard an angry oath and the words in a low tone:

"We was a-talkin' too loud, mates."

The next moment the same voice hailed:

"Ho the sloop! What craft is that?"

Leo wished to avoid all trouble, so responded in broken English:

"No speak English, senior."

"Speak Spanish."

"It's all right, mates, for it's a Diego craft and they could not understand what we said, if they heard us."

Then, in wretched Spanish he asked the name of the sloop and where from.

"The Volante, senior, from Corpus Christi," replied Leo in Spanish.

"All right; we are a guard-boat, so pass on," replied the man with a chuckle.

And the sloop did pass on, while Leo said:

"Coola?"

"Yes, master."

"Did you hear what those men said?"

"About girl?"

"Yes."

"Coola hear."

"They expect a boat?"

"Yes, master."

"We must be on the alert, get ready for them and head the boat off."

"Master knows."

"They must not carry off some poor girl, and if we put on a bold front, we can rescue her."

"Oh, yes," was Coola's reply, and Leo well knew that he could be depended on to the bitter end.

Coola had already loaded Leo's pistols, during the day, with powder found on the sloop, and now brought them on deck ready for use, along with an old musket he had found in the cabin.

Then he went forward, while Leo kept the helm, to watch for the coming boat.

Leo had already decided upon his plan of action, and calling Coola aft he made it known to him.

The negro gave a grunt of assent, and again went forward to his post.

Slowly up the stream the little sloop made her way, and half an hour passed, bearing her some two miles away from the schooner.

"Coming."

The word came from Coola, whose eyes seemed like an owl's, for he could see in the dark with remarkable distinctness.

The swash of the flowing stream, the rustle of the foliage ashore and chirp of insects, alone broke the solemn silence of the scene, while the moss hung in great funereal festoons from the

trees upon either bank, casting a most dismal and gloomy look over all.

But the keen ear of Leo detected the stroke of oars, and soon a black object appeared ahead upon the river.

As the sloop was sighted by those in the boat, Leo saw that they swerved from their course and headed in-shore to seek the gloom of the shadows along the bank.

Instantly, in a voice as closely imitating the one he had heard on the schooner, he called out:

"Ho, Cap'n Dick!"

"Ahoy! who hails?" came in response.

It was a critical moment, for Leo was convinced that there was no mistake, and that it was the boat he sought.

In fact, he could not understand why any other boat but one bound on an errand of devilry should be abroad on the river at that time of night.

He had heard the man who had just spoken called "Mate Nort'n," and upon this knowledge he determined to reply.

The boat had at once stopped when hailed, and Coola had whispered back:

"Four."

Leo understood this to mean that Coola saw four persons in the boat.

So, when the question came, "Who hails?" Leo at once replied, in the same disguised voice:

"Norton; come on board, for we had to give the schooner up and take this craft."

"The deuce!" said the man who had answered to the name of Captain Dick, and he said something in a lower tone to those with him in the boat.

"Coming," said Coola, and the negro glided aft to where Leo was at the helm.

Then the boat neared the sloop, and a stern voice called out:

"Luff, until I run alongside."

Leo obeyed, and the next moment the boat ran alongside of the sloop.

Leo saw that there were two oarsmen in it, and a man sat in the stern with a muffled form by his side.

Instantly there came the command:

"Surrender, men, or die!"

CHAPTER XIX. THE RESCUE.

WITH the startling words of Leo Lafitte ringing in their ears, the men in the boat were completely taken aback.

Coola had grasped the boat's painter and held it fast with one hand, while with the other he pointed the musket at the oarsmen.

It was done in an instant of time, and those in the boat could not but feel that they were entrapped, for that but two persons were on the sloop and had attempted a rescue of their victim, they could not believe.

Acting upon the idea that self-preservation was Nature's first law, the man who had answered to the name of Captain Dick, had uttered an oath and thrown a somerset backward into the river, leaving the muffled form by his side silent and motionless.

His two comrades were not so fortunate, for feeling themselves entrapped, they cried for quarter.

"Help that lady to the sloop's deck," sternly said Leo.

The man furthest astern arose in the boat and aided the muffled form to the deck of the sloop, and it was evident that the captive was both bound and gagged, for she was helpless.

"I have a mind to kill you both," said Leo, enraged at the manner in which the prisoner had been treated.

Then he added:

"Coola, bind them and put them in the hold."

"Yas, master," was the ready response, and it took the African but a few seconds to secure them and place them below decks.

Then the boat was taken in tow, the sloop, which was drifting rapidly down with the current, was put upon her course up the river once more, and Leo gave the helm to the negro, while he turned to the captive, whom he had placed in the cockpit.

"Now, lady, let me relieve you from your uncomfortable situation, and pardon my not doing so before; but we are but two, the leader of those villains escaped, and his vessel is below and might have caught us had we delayed."

As he spoke, Leo unwrapped the large shawl from the slender form, then he unbound the ropes that held both wrists and feet, and took from her mouth the gag.

The youth beheld the one he had rescued to be a mere girl, hardly more than in her teens, and

the sigh of relief she gave showed how happy she was at her rescue.

Giving her a cup of water, Leo then awaited for her to speak; but she burst into tears, and it was some time before she was calm again.

"I do not know who you are, sir; but I owe you my life, for those men meant to kill me, if they did not get a large sum of ransom, which I fear no one would have paid for me, as my father is not here," she said in a low, earnest tone, grasping Leo's hands in both her own.

"Oh, no, they would not have been so cruel, and when they found they could not get their price, they would have taken what they were offered; but I am glad that I got you out of their clutches, senorita, and it was mere chance that we did so," and Leo told the story of his having overheard what had been said on the deck of the kidnapper's vessel.

"And there are only you and this brave negro, sir?" asked the young girl.

"Yes."

"You are a sailor then, sir?"

"Yes, senorita."

"I like sailors, for my father is one."

"He is captain of an American vessel-of-war, and is now cruising in search of Lafitte, that terrible pirate, who, after fighting bravely for the Americans, in the battle of New Orleans went to sea again to once more turn buccaneer."

Leo started, and it pained him to know how his father's flight was regarded.

But he dared not utter one word in defense of Lafitte's act in going to sea, and so asked:

"What is your father's name, senorita, may I ask?"

"Henri De La Tour, sir, and mine is Helen."

Leo bowed, but did not give his name in return, and so she asked:

"Will you tell me your name, sir, for I wish to remember you in my prayers?"

"My name is Leo."

"It is a pretty name, and I never will forget it, sir."

"And how was it that you were captured by those men, senorita?"

"I am attending school at the convent, and once a month I am allowed to visit the home of one of my schoolmates, and it was while returning from a call upon her a carriage drove up to the banquet and a man sprung out, telling me that my father was at the convent and had sent for me."

"I suspected no harm, so got in, and in an instant I was rudely seized, bound and gagged, and the carriage drove down to the river where I was placed in a boat."

"From what the men said, I think the one they called Captain Dick had sailed with my father, and hating him from some reason, sought to revenge by kidnapping me."

It was too dark for Leo to see distinctly, but he felt that the young girl was very beautiful, and her voice was low and musical.

Soon after the sloop glided up to an anchorage off the city, and taking the captured boat Leo went ashore with the fair young girl whom he had secured, taking her at once to the convent.

There was considerable excitement there, when they arrived, for search had been made everywhere for the missing girl, who had been sent for at the place she was visiting, when she did not return at nightfall.

The loud ring of Leo was answered quickly by the opening of the heavy door, and Sister Mercedes appeared before them.

She started as her eyes fell upon Leo, and caught the young girl in her arms, while a chorus of delight went up from all who saw the return of Helen De La Tour.

The greeting over Sister Mercedes turned to Leo, but he was gone, and calling to him in the darkness brought no response.

He had disappeared, and in silence Sister Mercedes heard the story of the young girl's kidnapping and rescue, and the words:

"And he has gone, and excepting that his name is Leo, and he is a sailor—" and it seemed a cause of real grief to pretty little Helen that she knew nothing more about her gallant preserver.

And Sister Mercedes, who had recognized the youth, and could tell all about him, said nothing, and thus Helen's preserver remained, as it were, unknown.

CHAPTER XX.

THE YOUNG PIRATE AND THE GOVERNOR.

WHEN Leo had seen Helen De La Tour safely within the convent doors, he hastily turned and walked away.

He wished to avoid being thanked, and he cared not to be recognized by Sister Mercedes,

who would, he believed, let it be known just who he was.

For some reason he cared not to be known as Lafitte's son, to the little maiden, and he hoped he had gotten away before Sister Mercedes had recognized him.

It was getting late and he hastened to the executive mansion to see the governor.

He asked an audience, and was told that the office hours were over, but to call in the morning.

"Say to the governor, please, that I have a most important communication to make."

"Your name, please?"

"That is my card and name," and Leo put a golden eagle in the palm of the attendant, who bowed low, seemed to read the card at a glance and disappeared.

A moment after he returned and ushered the youth into the presence of the governor, who was in dressing-gown and slippers, and enjoying a glass of sherry before retiring.

He recognized Leo at a glance, as the youth who had come to General Jackson and himself, with Lafitte's offer to aid in the defense of New Orleans, and the proof that the British had made him most generous proposals for his services in their behalf.

"Ah! you are the son of Captain Lafitte?"

"Yes, your Excellency," and Leo bowed.

"Be seated, young sir."

Leo obeyed, and the governor gazed with admiration upon his handsome, fearless face.

"You and your father served us well, sir, in the fight with the British, and I was sorry that Captain Lafitte left the city as he did, ere pardon reached him, as I had promised."

"You received my father's letter, sir, stating that it had come to his knowledge that, pending the coming of the pardon, he was to be arrested, as he lay wounded in the convent, and placed in the city *carcel*, while his vessel and crew were to be seized?"

"Yes, I knew of that, and could not prevent it; but no harm should have come to Captain Lafitte."

"He did not know what might have happened, your Excellency, and so we set sail the night before the day set for the seizure."

"And now I have the pardon for himself, officers and crew, for their gallant services in the battle of New Orleans, and I was going to communicate with Captain Lafitte, at the address given in his note, telling him of the clemency of the President."

"Alas, your Excellency, it comes too late," sadly said Leo.

"Too late! what do you mean?" said the governor.

"I mean, sir, that when my father sailed from here, and wrote you that letter, he intended never again to hoist the black flag."

"And do you mean that he has done so?" reproachfully asked the governor.

"But once, sir, and the last time, for the schooner went down with the flag floating at the peak."

"You amaze me, young man!"

"My father, sir, sought to run down Ricardo, the senior captain of his fleet, whose treachery allowed the American flotilla to attack and take the stronghold of Barrataria, which Captain Lafitte intended surrendering, your Excellency, on certain conditions to you."

"Ricardo escaped from the island his treachery lost, and in his vessel and with a good crew, he began a career of piracy."

"We went in search of him, intending to capture his vessel, or destroy it, and thus prove to you that Captain Lafitte was in earnest in his new career."

"I believed that he was."

"We sighted Ricardo's vessel, gave chase, and while flying along the Mexican coast, fighting as we sailed, a British brig-of-war, the *Vulture*, ran out from inshore and opened on us."

"Captain Lafitte at once gave battle to the Englishman, while Ricardo escaped."

"The *Vulture's* captain knew the schooner, and at once opened a heavy fire; but my father determined not to surrender, and only when accused of being afraid to fight under his sable flag by the Englishman, did he hoist it."

"He kept the *Vulture* at bay, the fight lasting for several hours, and after nightfall the schooner sunk, her decks covered with dead and wounded, her guns fighting to the last."

"And Lafitte?"

"Sunk with her, sir, as I know that he wished to do, from what he said to me."

"I, with our faithful negro servant, Coola, managed to swim ashore, and a few of the men were picked up by the brig's boats; but my

father I never saw after we went down into the chaos of waters."

"It was just like Lafitte thus to die; but I congratulate you upon your escape, monsieur."

"The future is to prove, your Excellency, whether it is to be a case of congratulation to me; but I have a report to make to you, sir," and Leo told of his escape, the cutting out of the little sloop; the attempted murder of himself and Coola by the men, and then of his rescue of Helen De La Tour.

He told all as it occurred, and the governor listened with the deepest interest, and his admiration for the youth increased.

"Now, your Excellency, I do not care to be known in this matter, and the two prisoners I have on board I will bring ashore and surrender to your guard."

"Then, sir, it is my intention to go in search of Ricardo, and I beg your permission to purchase, arm, and equip a vessel at my own expense to hunt down this man and hang him."

The governor was amazed, and frankly said:

"My dear young friend, I would be only too glad to give you such authority, did I possess it; but I cannot, I assure you, do so."

"You will have to leave to the American cruisers the capture of this Ricardo, who I know is becoming a terror upon the seas, and, I think, is trying to palm himself off as Lafitte."

"And wherein, your Excellency, is my revenge, for the man to be taken by cruisers, for I consider him as the destroyer of my father?"

The governor was surprised at this view of it, and replied:

"Your revenge will have to be in knowing that the man is taken, young sir; but I regret I can do nothing about sending you in search of him."

Leo arose and said:

"Then I will bid your Excellency good-night, and within the hour those two prisoners shall be given up to your guard."

"Thank you, monsieur, and come to see me again, for I wish to give you the pardon papers received from the President."

Leo turned and replied:

"When I come for them, your Excellency, I trust you will consider that I have a better claim upon them than now."

With this remark, which Governor Claiborne had cause to remember well afterward, Leo left the presence of the executive and walked rapidly back to the spot where he had left his boat.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON BOARD THE SLOOP.

WHEN Leo reached his boat, he sprang in and hastily rowed out to the little sloop.

Coola was on the alert, and at the command of his young master he soon got the two prisoners from the hold.

They were in great fear, and gazed about them with an anxiety which showed they expected severe punishment.

"Who is the man you call Captain Dick?" asked Leo, as he confronted the men.

"I'll tell if I get terms," was the sullen reply of one of the men.

"And you, sir?" and Leo turned to the other.

"I talk only on terms."

"Coola!"

"Yes, master."

"Put these two men back in the hold, set the sloop on fire and let her drift down the river."

There was a calmness about the manner of Leo, which seemed to convince the men that he meant just what he said, and quickly they called out:

"We'll tell, sir."

"Well, what have you to tell?"

"Captain Dick is one of Lafitte's men, sir."

"Ah! and where is his retreat?"

"At the island stronghold, sir, which was destroyed, you know."

"He has a schooner?"

"Yes, sir, it was one of the little fleet, which was run ashore, but he got it about, manned it with a crew of ten, some of the old men, and some new ones, and is going to turn pirate, as soon as he gets a larger craft, for the guns at the island will arm her."

"I see, and a pretty good place it is; but you are not Lafitte's men?"

"No, sir, we are new hands who shipped with Captain Dick."

"And why did he kidnap that young lady?"

"To get big ransom, sir, and I guess, from what I heard, Captain Dick had some reason to hate her father, whom he once sailed with."

"Well, my men, if I gave you over to the governor, you would be hanged for your crime this night; but, as I believe you have told me

the truth, and I need some good men, I will not do so, if you are willing to serve me."

The men seemed only too glad of the chance, and Leo asked:

"Do you know where I can get some good men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"At Palita's Inn, sir."

"I will trust you, so go there at once and get me a dozen good men, and I'll pay you well for your services."

"You have paid us, sir, in not giving us over to the guards," said one of the men.

"Well, I believe I can trust you, and so do so."

"To-morrow night I wish you to meet me at the battle-field below the city, just at the line of works that touch the river, and have with you the men I need."

"I will run down in the sloop and land for you."

"If you serve me well, I will give you good pay and berths under me."

"If you deceive me, beware, for I am not one to forget one who wrongs me."

"Now come ashore with me, as soon as I return."

So saying Leo went into the cabin, and there wrote a few lines.

It was a note to the governor, telling him that he had changed his mind about giving up the two prisoners just then, and that when next he saw him he would explain his reason for so doing.

Then he said something to Coola in a low tone, and going on deck, got into the boat with the two men, and rowed ashore.

After again giving them instructions as to the men they were to get for him, he bade them go, and then started off toward the Executive Mansion.

Saluting the guard, he handed him the note, with instructions to place it in the hands of the governor when he came in the morning.

Returning to his boat Leo was soon on board the sloop.

But Coola was not there, and, apparently not in the least anxious about the negro, the youth took a seat in the little cabin and placed the legacy of Lafitte upon the table before him.

"Why do I shrink from reading what my father has written?" he murmured, as he held the sealed package in his hand.

"It tells me of his past, and of myself, of my brother, and yet I care not now to know the secret, nor will I discover it."

"No, I will place it away, this legacy of my father, to fathom at another time."

"These jewels I will bear to sister Mercedes to-morrow, and then I will be ready to start upon my mission, which is to bring Ricardo to the rope's end, for I will not be deterred because the governor cannot commission me to run him down."

"Ah! here is Coola," and, as Leo spoke the negro entered the cabin, dripping wet.

"You followed them, Coola?"

"Yes, master, Coola swim ashore and follow the men, as you tell him."

"Where went they?"

"They go to Palita's Inn, knock at side door and were let in."

"Well?"

"Me put ear to door crack and hear them talk."

"What said they?"

"Tell Palita Captain Dick got 'em caught, but you let them go and wish men, and ask him to get sailors for them."

"Good! then they are to be trusted?"

"Yes, master, for if they do different, Coola was ready, as you tell him, to capture them again."

"You have done well, Coola, and now we will seek rest, for no one will board the sloop; but in the morning early I wish you to go ashore and get me a different suit of clothes, and you had better wear one of those found in the sloop."

"Coola will, master," was the reply, and soon after perfect quiet rested on board the little craft.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NUN'S REQUEST.

THE next morning, dressed as a sailor lad, and with his tarpaulin shading his eyes, Leo rowed ashore and walked his way to the convent. He knew it well, as his father had lain there wounded for some time, and he had been a daily visitor upon him.

Going to the side gate, entering into the garden, and where he knew was the wing presided

over by Sister Mercedes, he knocked for admittance.

To his delight Sister Mercedes herself opened the little wicket and peered through.

In spite of his garb of a sailor, and his face shaded by his tarpaulin, she recognized him at a glance and bade him enter, while she said:

"I am glad to meet you again, Monsieur Leo, and hope that you bring tidings to prove that your father is no longer a terror upon the seas."

"Sister Mercedes, it is of my father that I would speak, and I have much to say to you, if you will tell me when I can do so."

"Now, for there is no one about the wing or garden."

"Come to the arbor yonder."

She led the way, and when he was screened from the view of any curious eyes, he said:

"Sister Mercedes, it was through your kindness in telling me what you had overheard, that my father was to be arrested and his vessel seized, that we were able to make our escape as we did."

"I did but my duty, Monsieur Leo."

"I trust you were not suspected in the matter, senorita?"

"No, though Lafitte's escaping with his vessel that night created a great excitement, and cruisers were ordered to capture and hang him wherever found."

"But, had he remained, I fear public opinion was so bitter that he would have been made to suffer, and so I cleared my conscience, feeling that I had only done right."

"And I thank you, Sister Mercedes."

"And why are you here again?"

"I came for two reasons—to see the governor, and to see you."

"To see me, monsieur?"

"Yes, Sister Mercedes."

A troubled look crossed the face of the nun, and she bit her lips, as though to suppress some deep emotion, while she said, after a moment:

"When I saw you last night, Monsieur Leo, a dread came upon me that you had returned to see me."

"You recognized me, then?"

"Yes, at a glance."

"And all knew then that the rescuer of the Senorita De La Tour is Lafitte's son?"

"No; for I spoke to no one of what I knew."

"I thank you for that, Sister Mercedes."

"And I thank you, Monsieur Leo, for your noble act in the rescue of that sweet girl."

"She will never forget you for it."

"She must not know who I am."

"No; I will keep your secret; but you had ought to tell me, you said?" and again the beautiful, sad face of the nun became clouded.

"Yes, I would tell you of my father."

"I feared it. Why sent he you to me?"

"He sent me to you to place in your hand these gems, that you might give them to the church as an atonement for his sins, hoping they would bring repose to his soul through prayer."

"For his repentance I have prayed, and will pray, and when he is dead there shall prayers be sent up to the Virgin for the repose of his soul."

"Sister Mercedes, my father is dead."

The words were uttered in a low tone; but they fell like a thunderclap upon the ears of the nun, for a cry broke from her lips, a cry of anguish, and tottering backward she sunk upon the rustic seat behind her.

Leo was startled, and amazed at her deep emotion.

He gazed upon her with alarm, for her face was as pallid as though life had fled, and her eyes were upraised with a stare.

"Sister Mercedes, I meant not to shock you so; but my father died on the deck of his ship, fighting a British brig far his superior in guns and crew."

"He would not surrender, and determined to die on his deck, so bade me come to the cabin, and there he gave what he called his Legacy to me."

"There were a number of papers, the story of his early life, which he had written out for me—see I have it here."

"He gave me a fortune in jewels, and these for you."

"Then he bade me farewell, and going on deck fought his vessel until she sunk with all on board."

"It was night, and we were near the shore, so I escaped, along with the slave, Coola, who you remember was here nursing my father, and I was on my way to the city last night when I was enabled to rescue the Mademoiselle De La Tour."

The words of Leo were spoken in a low tone, and though Sister Mercedes remained motion-

less, as she had sunk down upon the settee, she had heard all that he had said.

When he had finished, with an effort she spoke; but her voice had lost its sweetness and was hoarse and quivering:

"He is dead?" she asserted rather than asked.

"Yes, lady."

"And died like a brave man upon his deck?"

"Yes."

"Died while pardon awaited him here, for I have heard that that the President pardoned him."

"Yes, Sister Mercedes."

"Pardoned by man; Heaven will be merciful too, and his sins will be blotted out."

"Dead! ah that I could have known the fate that awaited him, when we parted."

She spoke rather to herself than to Leo, and the latter asked:

"You knew my father in the past, lady?"

She started at his words, and said quickly:

"Yes, I knew him; but you say that he left you his confession?"

"Yes, it is here."

"Ah! the seal unbroken?"

"Yes, lady, I have not read it yet, governed by some strange impulse to wait."

"Leo, will you give me that sealed package just as it is?"

She arose and held forth her hand, while her eyes pleaded earnestly to him.

He was surprised at her request and hesitated.

Seeing it, she asked again, and the face assumed a look of pitiful pleading.

"Will you give it to me, Leo, just as it is?"

A moment he hesitated, and then handed it to her without a word.

She grasped it eagerly and said, while the tears dimmed her eyes, and her lips quivered:

"God bless you, Leo."

"Now leave me, but come again some day, for I wish to know of your welfare; but now I cannot talk to you."

"Here is the gate key, leave it in the lock—good-by!"

He grasped her hand, bowed low over it, and departed, while she, with a moan of bitter anguish, pressed the package to her heart and sunk down upon the settee, her lips pressed hard against the lines written by Lafitte.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SLOOP SETS SAIL.

AFTER leaving the convent, Leo wended his way down into the town, where he made certain purchases that he needed, and sent them down to his boat, carrying them himself on board the sloop.

He had been deeply moved by his visit to Sister Mercedes, and wondered at her great grief; but yet he had yielded up to her the papers given him by his father without a word.

The death of his father had pained him intensely; but then his had been a strange bringing up, and he took it as a matter of course.

He had seen men die in battle, and death had always impressed him as being connected with violence, and he had expected some day the same fate would be his.

So when his father met death as he did, Leo, though grieving for him, looked upon his affliction in a philosophical light.

Having boarded the sloop, Leo and Coola set about getting things shipshape for the run to Barrataria.

He left his anchorage soon after dark, and dropped down the river with the current until he came to the battlefield.

There he landed, and was at once greeted by the two men whose freedom he had given them.

"We are here, sir," said one of the men, politely.

"And the others?"

"Are yonder behind the works, sir."

"Let them come on board, for I wish to be under way."

The man gave a signal and a crowd of men approached from the breastworks, where they had been waiting.

"Captain, there are the men," said the one who had before spoken to Leo.

"Lads, I am glad to meet you, and I have work for you."

"What it is I care not now to tell you; but serve me well and you get generous pay; but if there is one among you who cares not to venture on a cruise of which he knows nothing, let him fall out now, for once you have shipped I will stand no trifling."

"Come, who wishes to back out?"

Not a voice replied, and the men felt that they

were to be commanded by one who at once had given them confidence in him.

So they went on board with their little bundles of baggage, and the sloop was at once swung clear of the bank.

Sail was set, and with a fair breeze the little schooner went flying down the river.

Once under way Leo left Coola at the helm, and then, calling to the man who had been spokesman, entered the little cabin.

"Your name, my man?" he said, eying him in the light of the cabin lamp.

"Lomax, sir."

"What were you on schooner of Captain Dick?"

"Mate, sir."

"You will take the same berth here, and I wish you to send the men into the cabin here, one by one, for I wish to see what I am to command."

"Ay, ay, sir; but may I ask how I am to address you?"

"My name is Lafitte."

"Lafitte?" and the man started, and bent a most searching gaze upon the handsome, fearless-faced youth.

"Yes."

"There is a pirate by that name, sir, and—"

"I am his son."

"Lafitte's son?"

"Yes, and I shall be known as Lafitte, for my father is dead."

"Dead? Lafitte, the Pirate, dead?"

"Yes, he died on his deck, in a battle with the British brig-of-war Vulture."

"He would not surrender, so fought his vessel until she sunk, and so I am now Lafitte."

"Ah! I see, sir, and you will be as your father was?"

"No, for I am the avenger of my father, not a pirate."

"Now, Mr. Lomax, send the crew to me, and let me tell you that our destination is Barrataria."

"You will find Captain Dick there, sir, for I am certain he went there in the schooner, if he was not drowned in the river."

"It is he whom I go there to seek, Mr. Lomax," was the significant reply.

Lomax bowed in silence and went on deck, sending the men one by one into the cabin, where each remained for a short while under the searching questions and piercing eyes of the young sailor and were glad to get away again.

A fair wind wafted the little sloop to the mouth of the river in good time, and then she was squared away for the ruined stronghold of Lafitte.

Among the purchases of Leo had been some pistols, cutlasses and ammunition, so that he could arm his men.

The weapons were given out during the day, and the young commander drilled the crew to his satisfaction.

It was midnight when Lafitte's island came in sight, but Leo took the helm and boldly ran up the channel into the little harbor, where the anchor was noiselessly let fall.

Lying close inshore, the keen eyes of the youth detected a vessel, and, turning to Coola, he said:

"Go and find out just what she is, Coola."

"Yes, master," was the quiet answer, and throwing aside his clothing, the African slipped into the water and swam noiselessly away in the direction of the strange craft, the watch on which had certainly not observed the running in of the sloop.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST STROKE TO AVENGE.

"WELL, Coola?" said Leo, as he stopped in his pace to and fro on the little sloop and confronted the African, as he clambered all dripping from the sea.

"Schooner lie close inshore—same schooner we saw in river going up."

"One man watch on deck, but don't see much," said the negro.

"Did you see others?"

"Camp on shore, master."

"Ah! how many men?"

"Too dark to see, but think a dozen."

"Was Captain Dick expecting reinforcements, Mr. Lomax?" and Leo turned to his mate, who answered:

"The truth is, Captain Lafitte, I think he was expecting one of your father's fleet to return here, a new vessel, not supposing her commander had heard of the capture of the stronghold."

"Ha! the new schooner, Golden Wings, which my father was having built for himself, and had

sent an officer and a score of men to bring from Boston as soon as she was finished.

"He seemed to have forgotten about the Golden Wings, as I had, and Lieutenant Lester will doubtless come right here with her; and that is what Dick Chartro wants; but, Mr. Lomax, he will have to fight for what he gets," and the remark of Leo led Lomax to feel there would be war upon the morrow.

Nor was he mistaken, for when dawn began to break the anchor was gotten up, sail set, and the little sloop headed over toward the schooner, every man now thoroughly armed and Coola at the helm.

The flapping of a sail, as the sloop went about aroused the sleepy watch of the schooner, and he gave a loud cry of alarm.

But the sloop was now but a cable's length away, and bearing down upon the schooner, which was anchored close inshore, and had her sails furled.

"Ho the schooner!" cried Leo, and his voice, trained from childhood upon the sea, rung out like a trumpet.

A dozen men were now seen upon the deck of the schooner, and as many more had been aroused in the camp on shore.

Leo counted them at a glance, and said coolly:

"Nearly double our numbers, Lomax."

"Yes, sir."

Then came the answer to the hail:

"Ahoy the sloop! lay to, or I will fire upon you!"

"Ho, Dick Chartro, would you fire upon Lafitte?" asked Leo.

"Who calls himself Lafitte?"

"I do," and Leo sprang upon the low bulwarks of the little craft.

"Ha! you are Leo, Lafitte's son!" cried a large man with rough, bearded face, as he sprang upon the schooner's bulwarks.

"I am, and I have orders for you to obey."

"The stronghold is broken up, Lafitte's power is gone, and I obey only my own dictates now, Master Leo."

"Chartro, I came here to find you, for I know you as you are, and I have come strong enough to enforce my demands, so hear what I have to say."

"Ay, ay, say what you will; but I am my own master now."

"I will say that I have a quarrel with you, which I am willing to settle personally with you, and let the victor rule here."

"I have no quarrel with you, boy!"

"But I have with you, and unless you meet me, as man to man in a duel on shore, I will attack your schooner and carry it by boarding, swinging you in mid-air the moment I win the fight."

"This is a bold threat, boy; but what have you against me?"

"As you ask it, believing I do not know, I will tell you that I know you to have been the traitor pilot who ran the American fleet in here and destroyed this stronghold."

"It is false!"

"It is true, and I also know that, on the day of battle at New Orleans, you brought an officer by boat to the works held by my father, and thus enabled him to fire a shot which nearly cost him his life."

"I am sailing in the wake of revenge now, Dick Chartro, and you have to face me for life and death."

"Which shall it be, a personal combat, or a match of my force against yours?"

The burly pirate glanced at his crew, and then at the men on shore.

He was not sure that he could trust his men, for two-thirds of them were new hands, and he could not see what force Leo had and supposed, therefore, from his boldness, that he had more than double what he had in reality.

He had not supposed it known that he had been the pilot to run the American fleet in to the attack, or to guide Captain De La Tour to a point where he could fire at Lafitte, as he had done.

He did not know that Lafitte was dead, and half supposed he was on the sloop with Leo.

Knowing, as he did, that Lafitte had run his vessel out to sea from New Orleans, he could not understand the little sloop's presence there at the island, and feared that he might be in a closer trap than he supposed, as the whole of his old commander's force might be near in the schooner.

So he said, as these thoughts flashed rapidly through his mind:

"If we met in a duel, Master Leo, and I killed you, I would then have your father to fight."

"My father is dead, Dick Chartro, and I alone am Lafitte now."

"Come, will you meet me, or shall I board your vessel and hang you up?"

"If I kill you?"

"Then you command here, as I will do if you fall by my hand."

"I'll meet you; but when?"

"Now."

"Where?"

"Go alone in your boat to yonder point of land, and I will do the same."

"Take your sword only, as I will do, and the end will soon come to one of us."

"I agree," and five minutes after a small boat left the side of the schooner and pulled toward the point of land indicated by Leo, who also departed from the sloop at the same moment, and for the same destination.

CHAPTER XXV.

NUMBER ONE.

THE point of land which Leo had selected as the place of meeting between himself and the traitor pirate, was a sandy bar which put out into the little harbor.

The sand was hard and the point about ten paces wide.

Beyond, a couple of hundred yards, was the camp where Dick Chartro's shore force was, and from the point to the schooner was about two cables' length.

The sloop lay to one side of the point, and about equal distance as the schooner.

The place was therefore in the full view of all, and all eyes were turned upon the two boats, with their solitary occupants, as they rowed to the place of meeting, Leo approaching from one side, Captain Dick from the other.

Dick Chartro had always been a hard man to manage, and twice had Lafitte deprived him of his command, and it was revenge against his chief which had caused the man to act as pilot for the American flotilla and also, when he found Captain De La Tour seeking some one to row him to Lafitte's position in the battle, he had volunteered, and thus had been recognized, and the fact of his two acts of treachery reported to Leo.

As the youth sprung ashore upon the sand, he drew his sword and awaited the landing of Chartro.

"Come, lad Leo, there is no need of a quarrel between us, so let us be friends," said Dick Chartro, as he landed.

"No, Dick Chartro, I have come here to kill you, or be killed by you."

"You know, lad, that though you are a good swordsman, Dick Chartro took second place only to Lafitte in wielding a blade, and I can kill you."

"Do so, if you can."

"Better be friends."

"Be friends with a man who sought my father's life and ruin, who betrayed his comrades, and kidnapped a young girl a few nights ago?"

"You see that I know you, Dick Chartro."

The pirate's dark, cruel face flushed as Leo spoke of the kidnapping of Helen De La Tour, for he had supposed at least that was unknown.

"Why, you are lying in wait now at this island to entrap the new schooner, Golden Wings, when she comes and hoist your pirate flag over her decks; but I need that craft, Dick Chartro, for my own use."

"You shall never have her," cried the pirate, now infuriated at all Leo had said and knew of him, and the fact that his plan to entrap the Golden Wings was known.

As he spoke he sprung toward the youth, his sword ready for an attack.

As he had said, Dick Chartro was a good swordsman, while his strength was enormous.

He knew that Leo wielded a blade well, but that the youth had any chance with him he did not believe for an instant.

He had at first been anxious to be friendly with the lad, feeling that he would be of great service to him, and intending to offer him the berth of first officer on the Golden Wings, the new schooner, while he determined to hoist the black flag over her and put to sea as a pirate, unchecked by the humane orders which Lafitte, though an outlaw, forced his men to be governed by.

But now he meant to kill Leo, should he have to fight the sloop's crew afterward, and those who saw the two advancing to the combat felt that the victory could but be with Dick Chartro.

"It is madness for him to fight that big brute," said Lomax anxiously, for he had become much attached to his young commander.

It was Coola that he spoke to, and the African replied:

"Master all right, sir—Coola know."

And it seemed that Coola did know, for the first attack of the angry pirate was met by Leo with a skill that thwarted him.

He became more enraged and attacked viciously, trying to beat down the guard of the youth.

But Leo proved to have an iron wrist, and his skill was something wonderful, while his movements were executed with a rapidity that was marvelous.

Dick Chartro was mad indeed, and his one thought seemed to be to kill the calm youth, whose grim smile never changed under his fiercest attacks.

At times the man would become so maddened that he would force Leo to give ground and the men on the sloop would hold their breath in dread.

But only for a moment would the youth give back, and then his lightning-like movements would force the pirate to act upon the defensive and he in turn would be driven backward.

"Curses on you, boy! you wield a sword as did your father; but I will kill you yet," panted the pirate.

The smile left Leo's face, and he fairly hissed the words:

"And to avenge my father I now kill you, Dick Chartro."

The man uttered a cry and tried to strike up the blade that was pointing toward his heart.

But he was not quick enough and the sharp sword was driven into the body of Dick Chartro, who with a savage yell, like a wounded beast, tried to still cut down his adversary.

But Leo was too quick for him, and withdrawing his blade sprung back and the pirate fell upon his face a dead man.

"Number one! now for blow number two for vengeance," said Leo, as he turned and walked toward his boat.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SAIL IN SIGHT.

WHEN Leo rowed back to the sloop, he gave an order to Lomax in a low tone, and calling to Coola to accompany him, gave the oars over to the negro.

Then he pulled boldly toward the little schooner, whose crew seemed at a loss what to do, after having seen their leader fall.

Dick Chartro was a most cruel commander, and hence unpopular; but the men had cast their lot with him to become pirates and if he gained gold for them they were content.

Just what Leo meant to do they could not tell, and the entire crew of the schooner felt uneasy as to what would be the result of Chartro's death.

Reaching the schooner Leo boldly sprung on deck and glanced about him, while he asked in his stern, commanding way:

"Who is the officer in charge here?"

"I am, sir," and a young man stepped forward, whom Leo remembered to have been one of the buccaners under his father.

"Senor Bronco, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Were you on the island when it was attacked by the treachery of the man I just killed?"

"Yes, sir, and was captured by the Americans, and made my escape, by pretending to be badly wounded."

"Well, Senor Bronco, retain command of the schooner, but remember you are under my orders now."

"I certainly am glad of it, Senor Leo, and I congratulate you upon your victory over Dick Chartro, whose skill we all know but too well."

"Thank you, Senor Bronco; but now to the men on the shore."

"They are men who came down from the city in small boats, by way of the bayous, senor, and they were sent to Captain Chartro by his agent there."

"There are a score more to arrive within a day or so."

"Indeed! I am glad of this, for it will give me a good crew, with those on your schooner, and my men on the sloop, while Lester, who is about due on the Golden Wings, will have a score more."

"Yes, senor; but you will need a large force for the Golden Wings."

"And will have fully ninety men, all told."

"I will make you second officer, Senor Bronco, after Lester, and Lomax, on the sloop will be third luff, so I will be well officered at least, and I certainly think my crew will be a good one; but if not, we must make them so, as my father did."

"Commodore Lafitte was a wonderful man, Senor Leo; but I have perfect confidence in you,

senor, and will be happy in serving you," was the complimentary remark of the young Spaniard.

Leo now bade Senor Bronco go ashore with him, and the men there were very glad of a change of masters, and already regarded Leo with awe, from the fact that he had slain the terrible Captain Chartro, and also was the son of Lafitte, whom they had looked upon as a superior being, for the men shipped by Palita had most generally been outlaws, and this last shipment were not exceptions to the rule.

Having got his men all in hand, Leo ordered the body of the pirate captain buried and all of his effects divided among the men, which was a pleasant surprise to them, as Dick Chartro was always well supplied with gold, or its equivalent in gems.

Then the men were set to drilling, at the oars, and setting and taking in sail on both the sloop and schooner, until Leo discovered just how expert they were.

Some of the guns of the old fortress had been put in order by Captain Chartro, and others had been fished up from where they had been thrown into the sea, and these were mounted on shore and the men set to drilling with them.

Cutlass exercise, firing with pistols and muskets, and the using of boarding pikes the men were then disciplined in, until the young commander began to feel that he would have a most superior crew, especially as nearly every one of them had been under fire often before.

The crews were divided and sent on board the sloop and schooner, which got under way and maneuvered in the harbor, when they would be laid alongside and boarding and repulsing boarders was gone through with.

Thus a week passed away, and one morning a sail was reported in sight.

Leo at once went to the foothill, accompanied by Senor Bronco and Lomax, and beheld a schooner coming in toward the harbor.

It was a large schooner, very long and narrow, and the clouds of canvas over her decks seemed to be sail enough for a vessel more than twice her size.

But she stood well up under the enormous pressure, though a ten-knot breeze was blowing, and skipped through the waters so quickly that she seemed hardly to be moving, for her bows were so sharp they carried no "bone in her teeth."

"It is the Golden Wings, and she is fairly flying," said Leo with more enthusiasm than he was wont to show.

The others also remarked upon her marvelous speed and then Leo said:

"Can you see her flag, Lomax?"

They all had their glasses, but the course of the schooner, head on to them, had prevented their seeing the flag flying at the peak.

A moment after the question was asked the schooner veered in following the channel and then there was revealed a huge black flag in the center of which were a pair of golden wings.

At the same moment there was run up to the fore a small blue flag also bearing the golden wings in its center.

"It is, as I supposed, the new schooner, for she shows the old Barratarian flag and my father's private colors at the fore."

"We will signal her and then go down to the shore," said Leo.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GOLDEN WINGS.

AT the command of Leo, Bronco, who knew the pirate signals thoroughly, signaled the new schooner a welcome, and they were promptly responded to, while the three officers gazed at the beautiful craft with the greatest admiration.

"Why, she is fully armed," cried Leo, as he got a view of her decks.

"She is indeed, Captain Lafitte, seven guns to a side, and a pivot fore and aft—a heavy battery for her, and they appear like pieces of large caliber, all of them," assured Lomax.

"She's tremendously narrow in the stern, but a beautiful model, Captain Lafitte," Bronco remarked.

"And look at the immense height of her masts and length of her spars."

"Her bowsprit is half as long as her hull."

"See the beautiful rake of her masts."

"There, she was not five seconds in stays and works like a charm."

"Lester knows what she can do and is trying to show her off."

Thus they talked of the merits of the new vessel, while they walked down to the shore.

There they took a boat and rowed out upon

the bay, just as the schooner came driving in, shortening sail as she did so.

As she swept around and dropped anchor, the boat ran alongside and Leo boarded.

He was met by a young man of twenty-five, with a sun-bronzed resolute face, and large, expressive eyes; hardly a face one would expect to wear the brand of pirate upon it.

He was a good form and saluted Leo politely, while his looks were expressive of amazement as he glanced about him and beheld no fleet in the little haven, the forts in ruins, the cabins burned down and but two small vessels and as many score of men visible.

"I give you welcome, Lester, and in answer to your surprised looks will tell you that Commodore Lafitte was offered pardon, rank and gold by the British to serve them; but refused and fought with his vessel's crew for the Americans.

"Doubting the honest purpose of Lafitte, an American flotilla came here and, through the treachery of Ricardo to his duty, left it as you see.

"Lafitte went to sea in his schooner *Destiny*, intending to run down Ricardo; but the British brig-of-war *Vulture* saved him, and sunk us, and Coola and myself escaped, by swimming to the shore, while several of the men were picked up by the cruiser's boats."

"The chief dead?" said Lester, sorrowfully.

"Yes, and I am now the only Lafitte, and shall command the *Golden Wings*, unless you desire to dispute my right."

"No indeed, Senor Leo, I will always follow the lead of a Lafitte," was the frank response.

"I thank you, Lester, and you are to be my first officer, and we sail soon and then you will know my purpose.

"Now tell me of the *Golden Wings*, whose existence, amid other matters, my father seemed to forget, as I did also."

"Well, Captain Lafitte, I found the schooner ready when I got there, and that she is a beauty you can see for yourself, while she is as fleet as the wind and stanch as a rock.

"The fourth day out we got caught in a fearful storm, and drove before it towards the northward for a whole week, and it seemed luck that we did so, for, when at last a calm came we sighted a wreck lying inshore on the Massachusetts coast, for we had been driven that far to the north."

"I rowed ashore and found the wreck deserted, and lying upon a ledge, in a sheltered nook, with plenty of water right alongside, and I at once determined to arm the schooner with the splendid battery found on board.

"The craft was a new vessel, a brig of three hundred tons, and evidently built as a privateer.

"She had this splendid battery that you see, any quantity of small-arms, stores and in fact all that we could ask for.

"Her crew had evidently been swept overboard when she struck, for her bottom was stove in, her masts gone and the shock must have been terrible.

"I towed the schooner in, made her fast alongside the ledge, and fortunately we had two days of dead calm weather, so I transferred all to the *Golden Wings*.

With her battery on board she sailed even better than before, and in this craft, Captain Lafitte, you certainly have a most remarkable vessel."

"She shall have every opportunity to prove her worth, Lieutenant Lester; but how many men have you?"

"Just twenty-seven of us all told, sir."

"And the boats with the extra men from the city are in sight, sir, coming from the mainland," said a seaman who had just boarded to bring Leo the news.

"Good! now we will be all ready to sail within the week, and the *Golden Wings* will have a chance to prove what she can do, for there is work ahead of her," was Leo's significant remark; but what that work was only the young commander knew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NUMBER TWO.

THE British brig-of-war *Vulture* had been more crippled in her fight with Lafitte's schooner, than was at first supposed.

Her commander had been angry with Lafitte for refusing the offers made him, and had sought his revenge in the capture of the pirate and hanging him.

That it was possible for the little schooner to withstand the brig was not thought of, and the *Vulture's* captain and crew anticipated an easy

victory, after which chase could be made after Ricardo and he too taken.

Why the schooner of Lafitte, and that of Ricardo, were fighting, the Englishmen could not understand for both were known to belong to the fleet of the Barratarian Buccaneers.

And so it was that Captain Grayson singled out Lafitte as his prey.

But, with Leo at the helm to handle the schooner, and Lafitte in command, the *Destiny* very soon proved herself a very dangerous foe.

Not a shot was thrown away, and the speed and splendid handling of the schooner prevented the *Vulture* from boarding.

And so the battle had waged until the pirate craft, fighting her guns to the last had gone down into the Gulf.

Admiring his gallant foe Captain Grayson had launched his boats, hoping to pick up Lafitte, and give him his life, for the flashes of his guns had shown him standing on his deck as the schooner went down.

But half a dozen pirates only were picked up, and none of these proved to be Lafitte.

They had reported that Lafitte and his son had gone down with the schooner, and so the *Vulture* headed quickly inshore, for she was reported to be looking badly.

Into a little landlocked basin she was run and anchored in shallow water.

Then the many dead were buried, the wounded were rowed inshore, under the shelter of the trees, and tenderly cared for, and the repairs of the brig looked to.

But, as I have said, the brig had been most severely handled by the schooner, and so the repairs took time.

New spars had to be cut in the woods and made to replace those which had been almost torn to pieces, while the hull had to be repaired in numberless places and the bulwarks patched.

As the wounded were doing better ashore, than they would on shipboard, Captain Grayson took things quietly and made no haste to get to sea.

And so the time went by until the *Vulture* had been three weeks in hiding in the little cove before she was again ready for sea.

One afternoon, when all hands were busy getting the wounded on board, and all in readiness to go out with the tide at sunset, a young midshipman startled all with his shrill cry:

"Sail ho! sail ho!"

There was no need to ask where she was, for not a mile away was seen a large schooner moving boldly in toward the little harborage where the brig lay at anchor.

A good breeze was blowing, and the schooner was beating in rapidly.

She was armed, had her working sails set and her men at the guns.

The brig was caught in a bad plight.

Her boats were going to and from the land, bringing the wounded, water-casks and traps that were ashore, while her deck was hampered with many things.

No one had expected a foe in there, and not a soul was prepared for a fight.

Fortunately, they saw that the schooner did not look like a match for the brig, but there were many that in the same thought remembered how Lafitte had crippled them, small as had been his vessel.

The *Vultures* were clearly caught on their roost, and for a moment there was something like a panic; but Captain Grayson was a thorough commander and his discipline soon held supreme sway.

The schooner was at first pronounced a British vessel, for she carried no colors to distinguish her by.

Then it was said that she was an American cruiser, and last all decided that she must be an American privateer.

In the mean time decks were being cleared, the boats called in, anchor gotten up and sail set.

But a few minutes after having been sighted the schooner fired a gun over the deck of the *Vulture* and ran a flag up to her peak, and a small one up to the fore.

The first was a large red field with a huge pair of golden wings in the center, while the latter was a blue flag with wings of gold.

"One of Lafitte's pirates, as I live, for there is his golden-winged flag," cried Captain Grayson.

"But his field was black, sir, with the golden wings," said a lieutenant.

"True, but the red is even more ominous, more suggestive.

"I only hope Lafitte really went down in his schooner, for with such a commander as he on that craft, and caught as we are, we could

not beat him off," said Captain Grayson in a low tone to his first luff, who muttered in reply:

"You are right, sir; but there we get it!"

And toward the brig came a torrent of iron, as the schooner squared away and gave her broadside in full.

It was well aimed and hit hard.

Almost instantly the schooner came back upon her former course, and then suddenly pulling off gave her starboard broadside to the *Vulture*.

The iron shot tore through the hull and rigging, doing much damage, and the *Vulture* was not yet able to reply.

She had to get her decks cleared, her anchor up, sail set and men at the guns, and in the condition in which she was caught, that could not be done in a minute of time.

A third broadside, and a fourth, came from the *Golden Wings*, also doing much damage, while the fleet craft was running rapidly in, as though anxious to come to close quarters.

Upon her decks her men stood at their guns, working them splendidly, while a party of boarders were grouped amidships, ready for use.

Her crew must have numbered ninety men, or more, and men clad in white duck trousers, blue shirts and red skull-caps, with gold wings upon the latter.

The craft was in perfect trim, every rope in place and her decks were unscarred, and snowy white.

Upon the quarter-deck stood Leo Lafitte, dressed in a neat blue uniform, with golden wings upon either shoulder and upon his cap, while his officers were similarly attired.

Leo was perfectly calm, and upon his face rested the same grim smile which had been there when he had fought Captain Dick Chartro.

He had often commanded in battle, for his father had yielded to him as chief, and his nerve, skill and coolness under fire all had remarked among the league.

He had determined, when he set sail in the *Golden Wings*, to hunt down the *Vulture*, and knowing that she had suffered severely in her fight with the schooner, he hoped to find her somewhere near the scene of combat on the coast.

A coaster he had hailed told him the brig was anchored in the basin, repairing, and he had landed Coola to go and reconnoiter.

Coola had done his work well, and so the attack on the *Vulture* had been well timed, Leo hoping, with her decimated crew, from her last battle, and catching her in disorder, to make up for her greater strength.

And well had he calculated, for his hot fire upon the brig, before she was able to strike back, almost demoralized the crew.

The *Golden Wings* was now near the little harbor, and held on directly for the entrance, as though to boldly run in, and still the brig had not fired a damaging shot, though several had been brought to bear upon the schooner.

Another broadside dismounted the guns upon the *Vulture* and brought down a dozen men.

"There is a panic on board, Captain Lafitte," said Lester.

"Head her into the basin," ordered Leo, and the bow guns began to play sharply upon the Englishman.

Just as the schooner entered the basin the brig got under way, and swung around for a broadside.

It was fired, but the helmsman was evidently nervous and the shots flew ahead of the schooner.

A wild cheer at this broke from the *Golden Wings*, and a broadside was returned which hit the brig fairly.

"I'll board him," said Leo calmly, and he gave the necessary orders.

The brig was also at a disadvantage in the little basin, being differently rigged and not so easily handled, while, drawing more water she could not swing about as did the schooner.

As she had either to go about, or go ashore, Leo chose this moment for boarding, and, after another broadside, followed by a volley of musketry from all hands, the schooner was run up under the stern of the *Vulture*.

Grapnels were thrown, pistols rattled, and then like a drove of wolves the *Golden Wings* were led by Leo upon the deck of the brig.

Captain Grayson was there to meet them, and his men fought bravely; but fortune was against them, they had been surprised, unnerved, and suffering greatly under the fire of the schooner, were almost unmanned.

And so the *Golden Wings* drove them forward; some were tumbled into the sea, others

shot and cut down, and the victorious advance continued.

The Golden Wings suffered too, and many went down; but their advance could not be checked and ere long cries of quarter were heard.

Then, with a white face and voice trembling with emotion, Captain Grayson asked for quarter for his crew, while he reluctantly tendered his sword.

"Keep it, sir, for in hauling down the colors from this brig, I avenge my father, Lafitte," said Leo quietly.

"Ha! you are the youth who carried Lord Lennox ashore, with his offer to the pirate chief from the British commanders?" cried Captain Grayson.

"Yes, sir, I am Lafitte's son, and when you sunk his schooner, some weeks ago, my father went down in her.

"I escaped death, and I have avenged his death at your hands."

"And you are a pirate?" said Captain Grayson reproachfully.

"No, I am an outcast, trying to win an honorable name, and your vessel I shall surrender to the United States Government," was the reply of Leo, and there was a bitterness in his tone, commingling with triumph at his success, which the British commander could not but observe.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE Golden Wings had not escaped wholly unscathed in the combat with the Vulture, and her crew had suffered considerably, so Leo determined to send her, under Lieutenant Lester, to the island stronghold for repairs, while he, with a prize crew, ran the brig to New Orleans.

Repairs that were necessary were rapidly made upon the Vulture, her crew placed in irons, her officers given the freedom of the ship under parole, and the vessel was headed for the delta of the Mississippi.

It was night when she dropped anchor off the city, and Leo went at once ashore to communicate with Governor Claiborne.

He was received at once, and Leo told the simple story of his capture in his modest way.

The governor was delighted, and said:

"My brave young friend, this should certainly gain for you a commission in the United States Navy, and in the morning I will put the whole affair before those in authority here."

But alas for Leo! those in authority took the capture of the Vulture in a different light from what the governor did, and who had resigned from his official capacity, and they could only see Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, in his son.

The captured brig was at once taken charge of, and Leo and his men told to accept their pardons and go their way in peace.

Leo's heart was full at this treatment, and he knew not what to do.

Then he remembered that, in their joy at getting possession of the brig, they had asked nothing about the means of her capture, and his beautiful Golden Wings was yet left to him.

So he gave his men secret orders, and then sought the quarters where he was stopping.

For a long while he paced the floor in silence.

Then he said, aloud:

"And such is the way I am treated for acting with honor?"

"So be it, I will yet force them to regret that they still regarded me as Leo, the son of Lafitte the Pirate."

Several days after the good governor called upon him, accompanied by a distinguished officer.

Those in authority had been convinced that they had acted harshly, had not treated the young sailor just right, and, under the influence brought to bear, they were willing to make amends.

Especially were they willing to do so, as they now remembered that Leo had captured the brig with an armed schooner, and that he had not brought his own vessel to New Orleans.

That armed vessel he could go to, they knew, and perhaps, angered by his treatment, he might again sail under the black flag.

So the governor went to seek the young sailor, armed with authority to treat with him for his vessel, and to give him full honor for his capture.

But Leo was gone. Two days before it was said, he had departed, and whither he was gone the landlord could not tell.

Then his men were sought for, at the various sailor boarding-houses, and it was discovered that they too had disappeared.

"We shall hear from Leo Lafitte again," said the governor, significantly.

And he was right, for Leo kept his word and the name of Lafitte did not end when the Destiny went down into the depths of the Gulf of Mexico.

THE END.

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